

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT



FOREWORD BY
VINCENT KENNEDY McMAHON





It's 1963, a time of cultural turbulence and uncertainty. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. articulates his dream for the future, an escalating Cold War causes many to fear that better days may never come. People looked to sports and entertainment – to seminal figures like Willie Mays, James Bond, and The Beatles – to provide a welcome distraction from trying times. From his oval office in Washington D.C., revered leader JFK strived to unify an evolving nation.

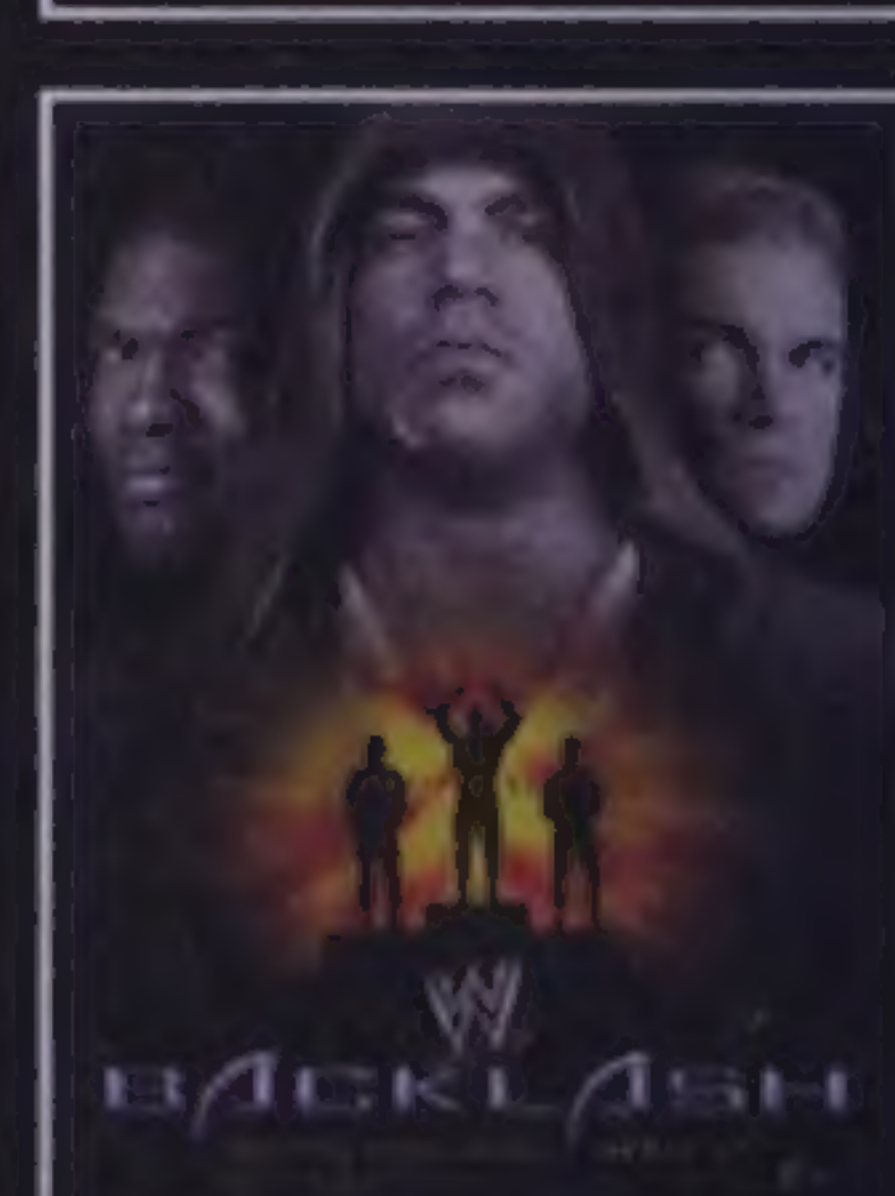
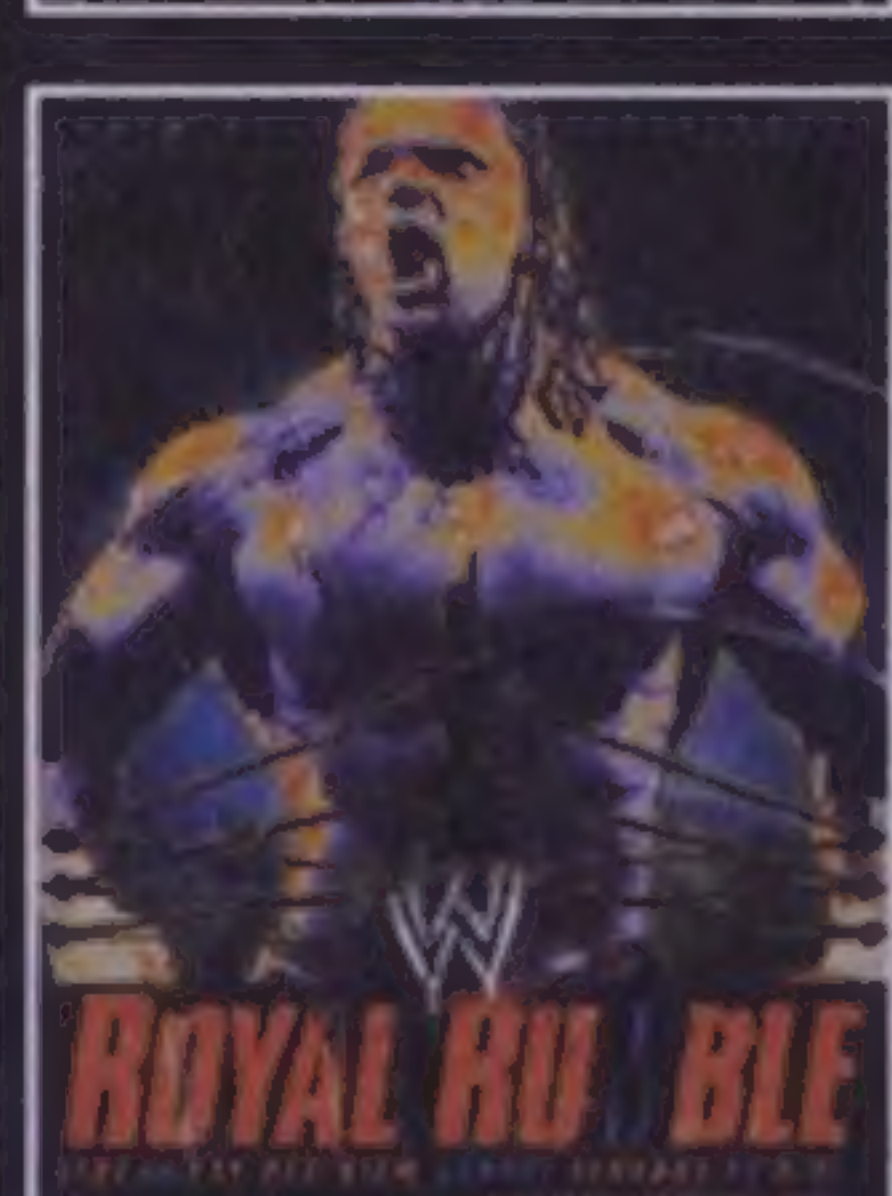
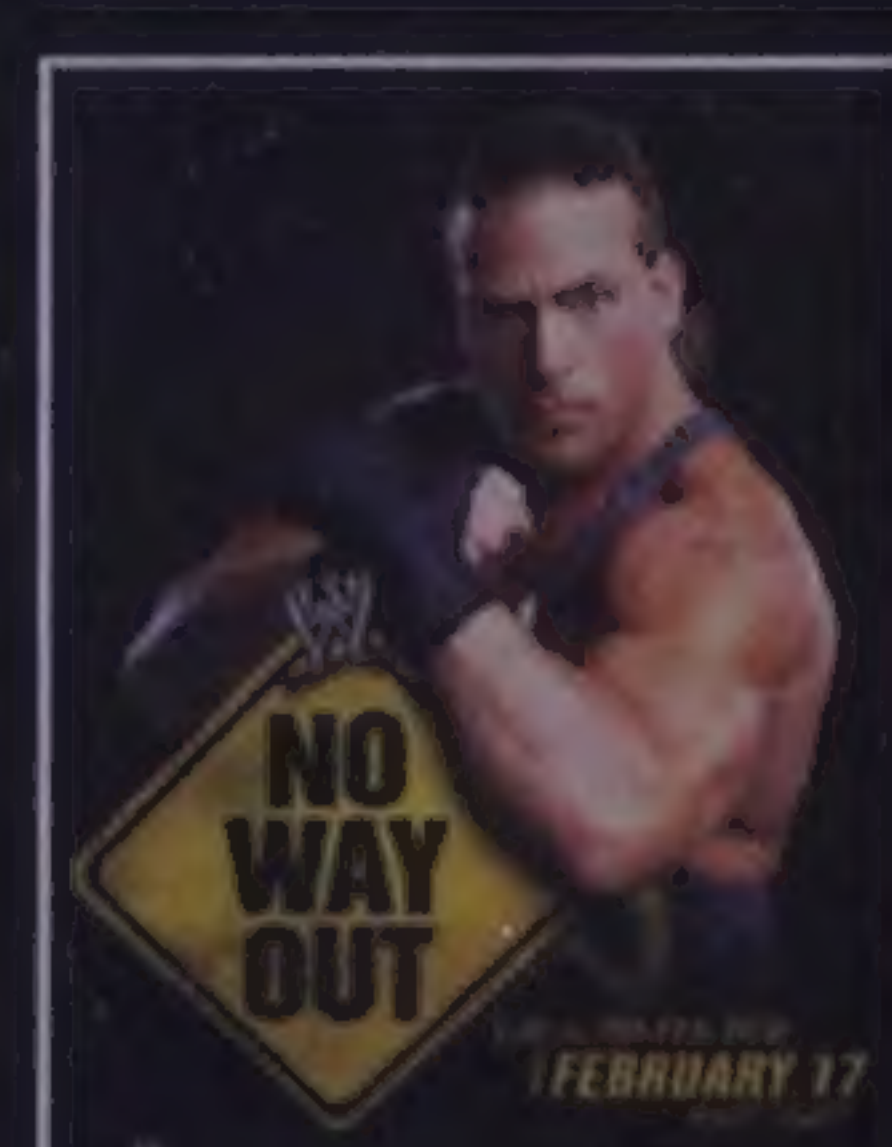
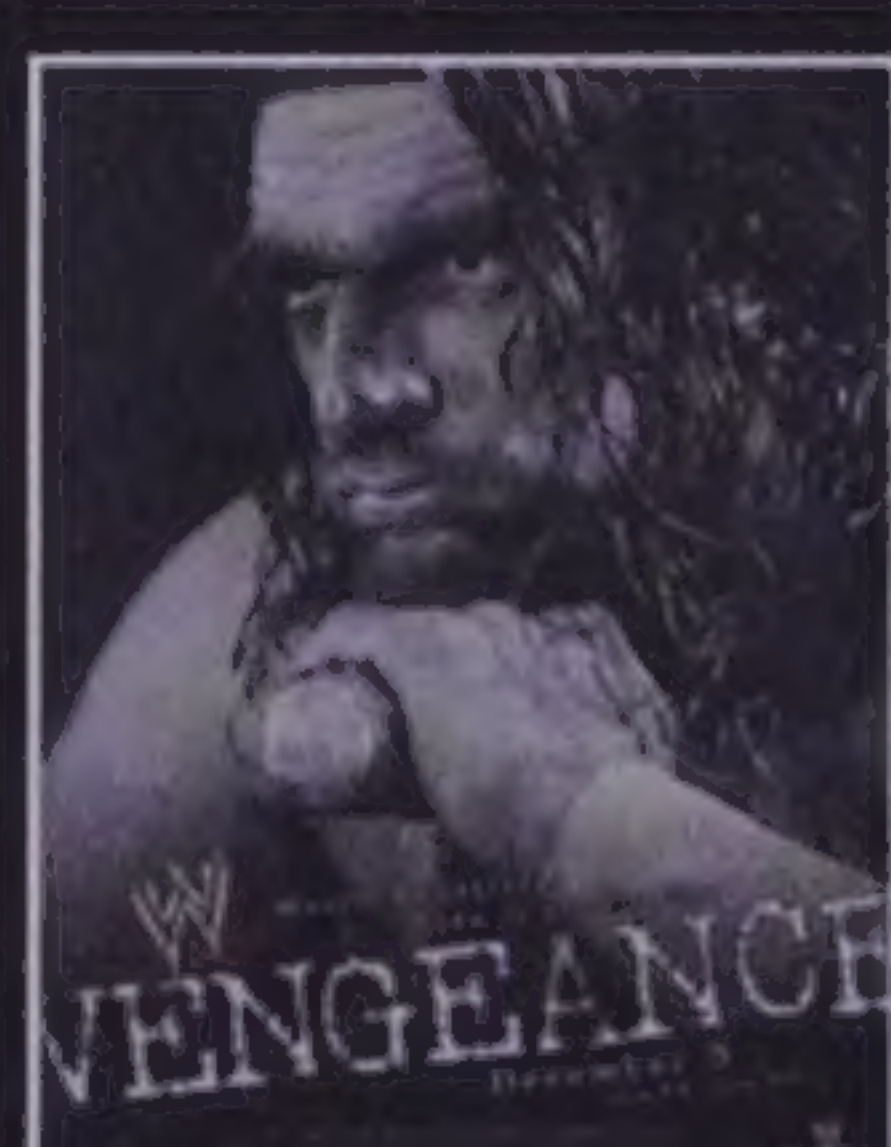
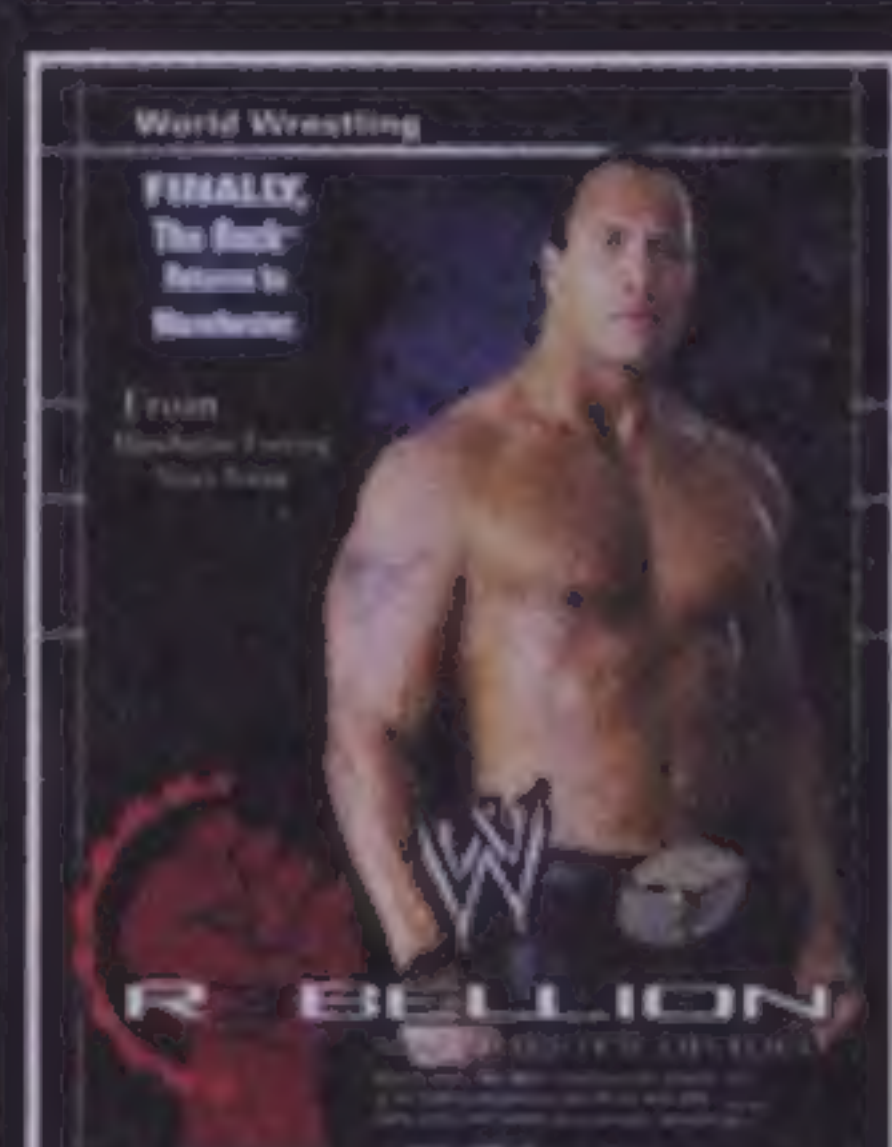
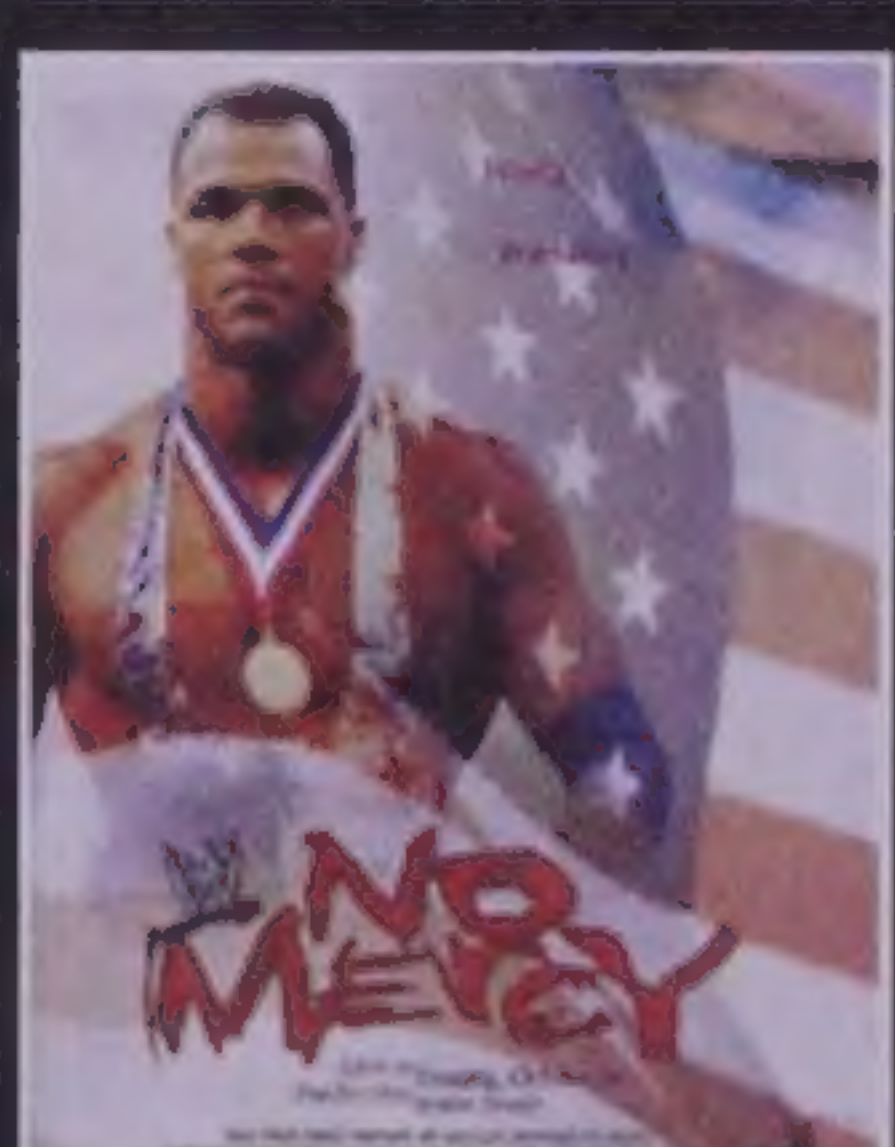
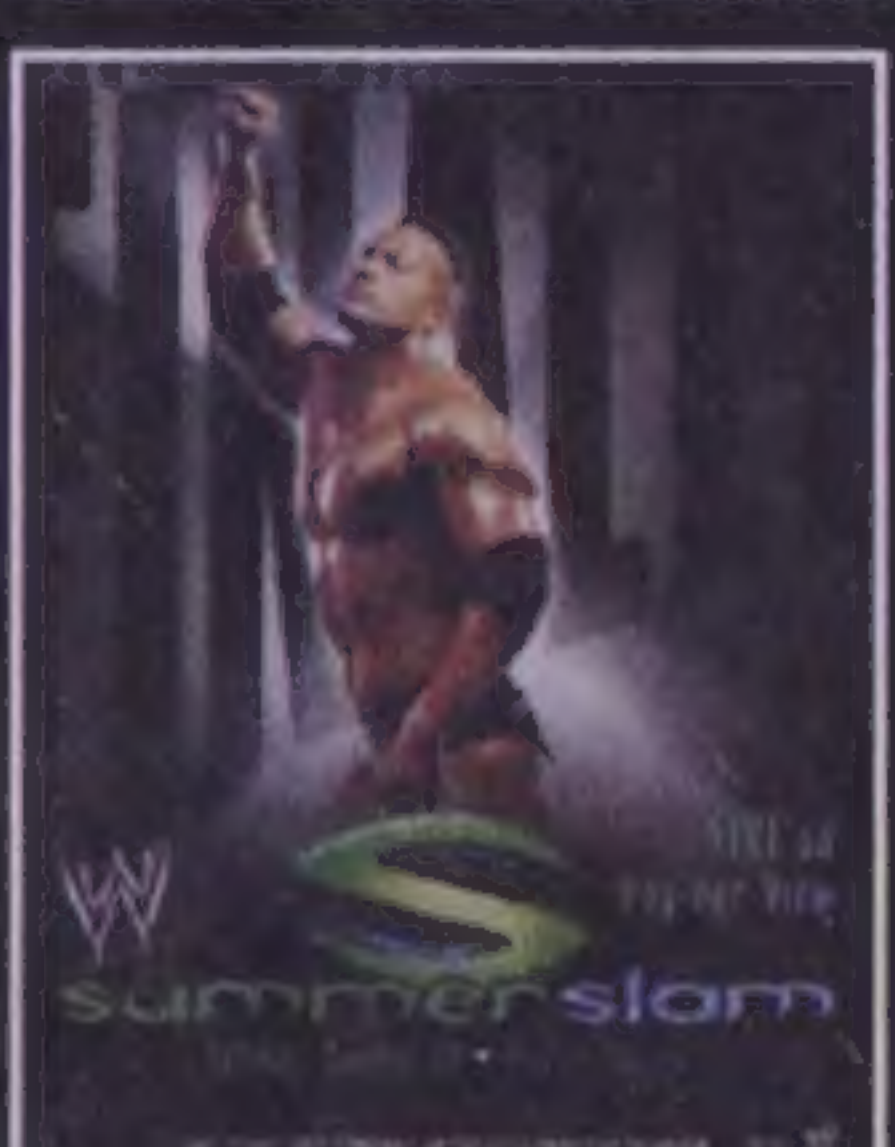
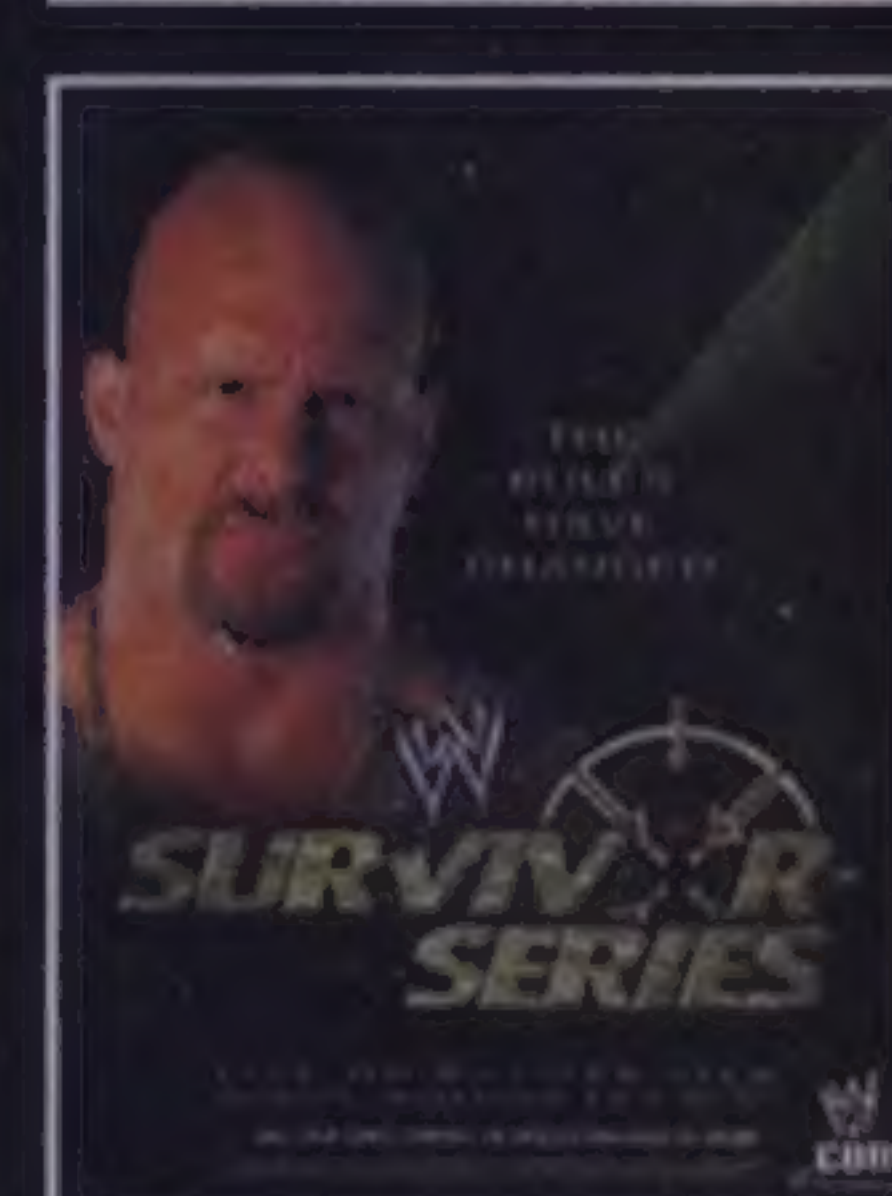
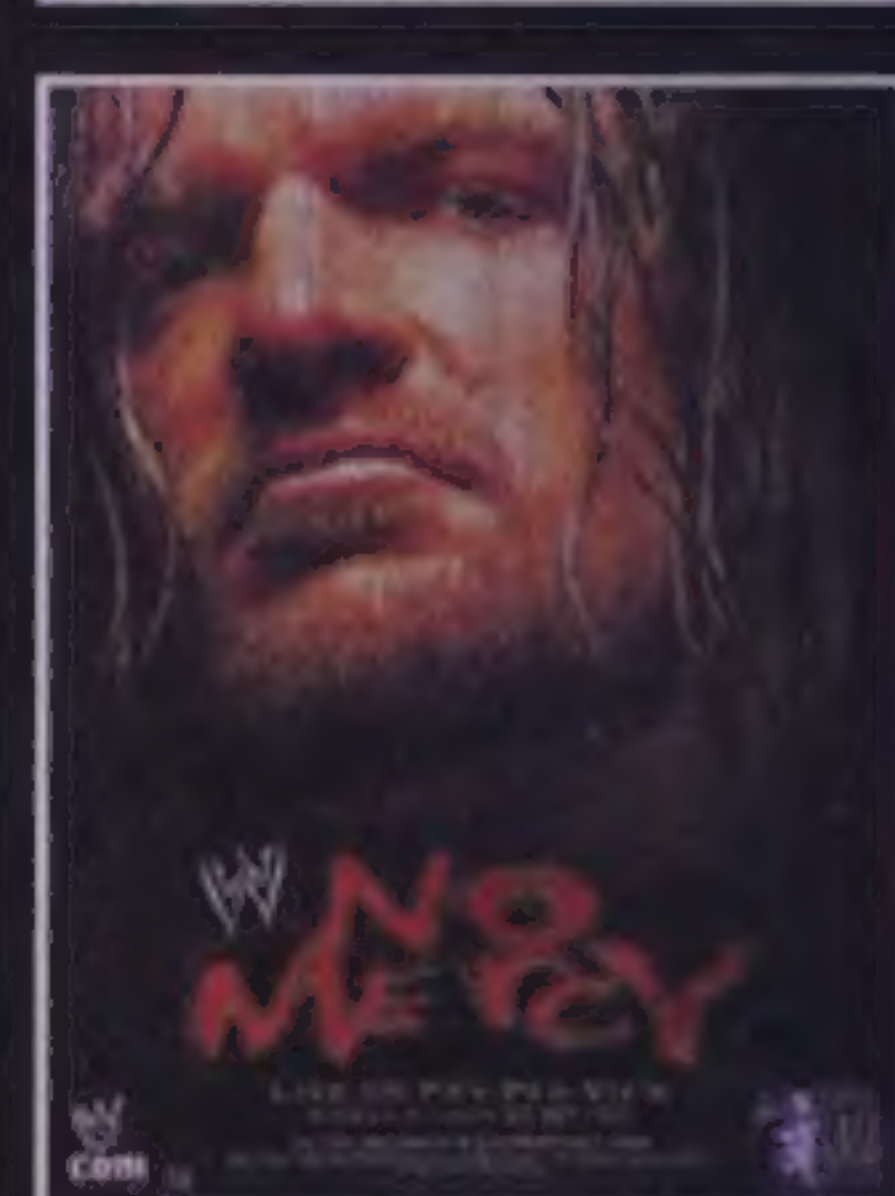
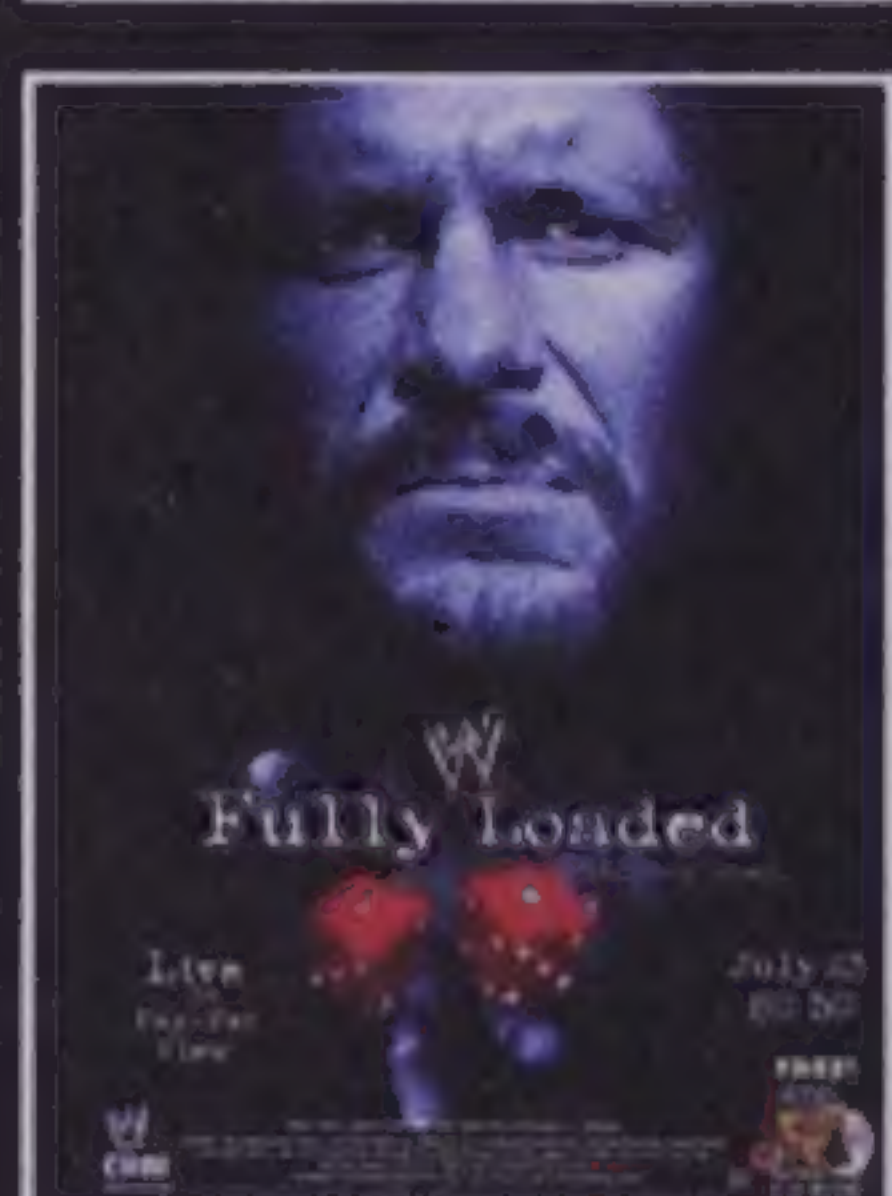
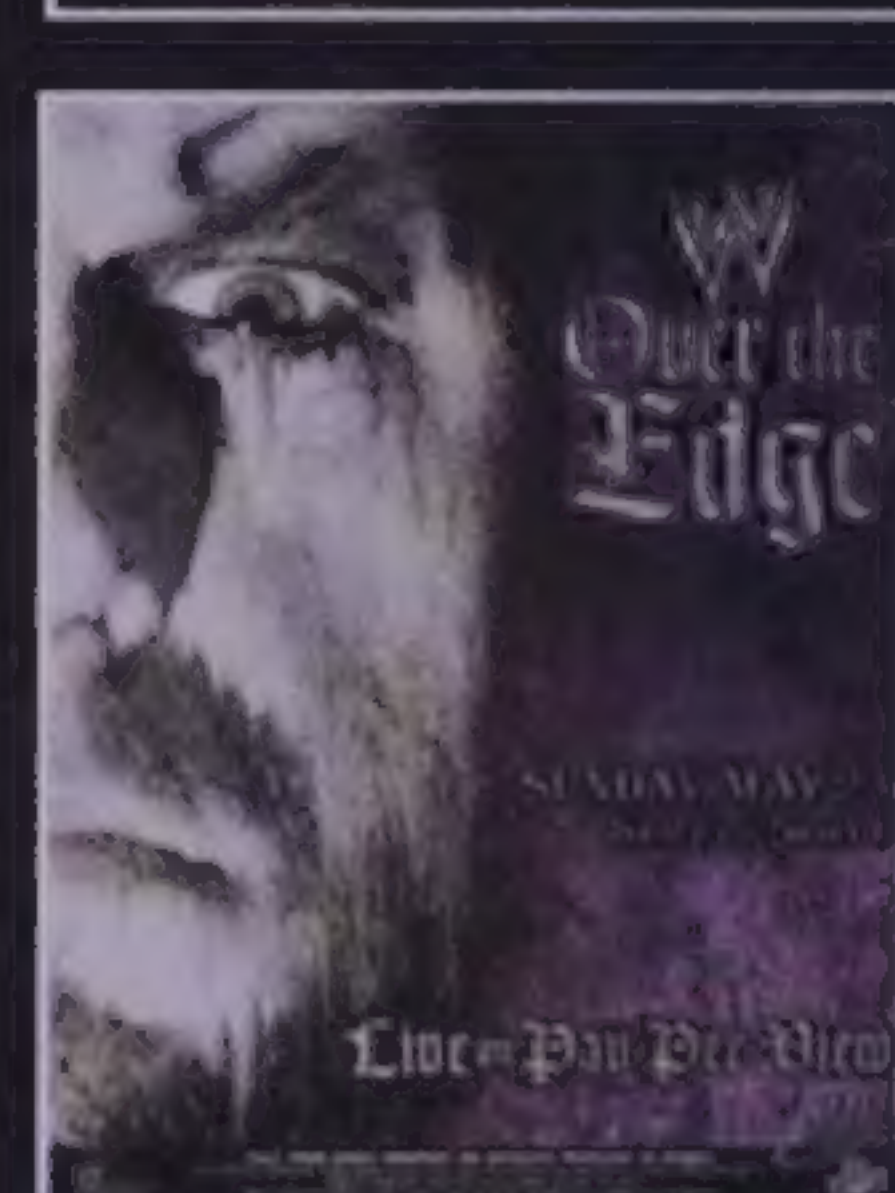
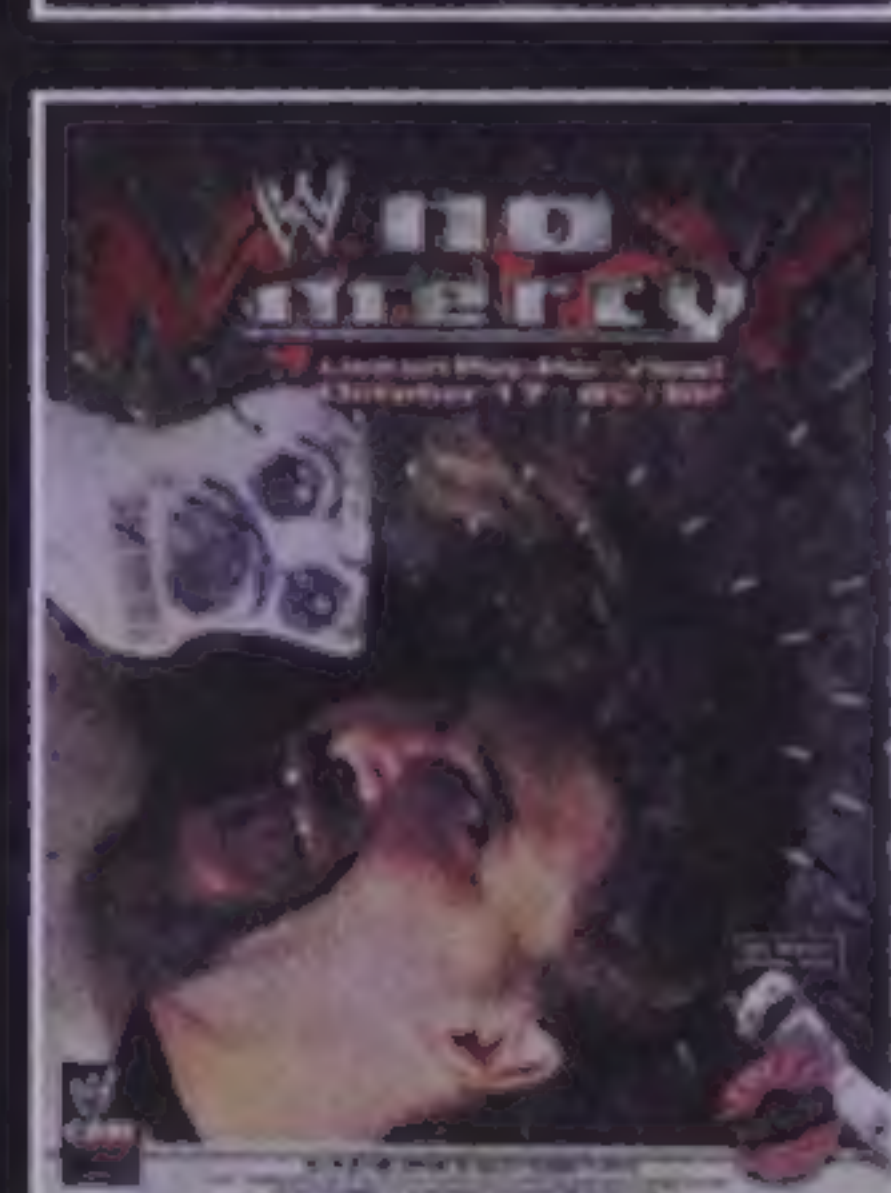
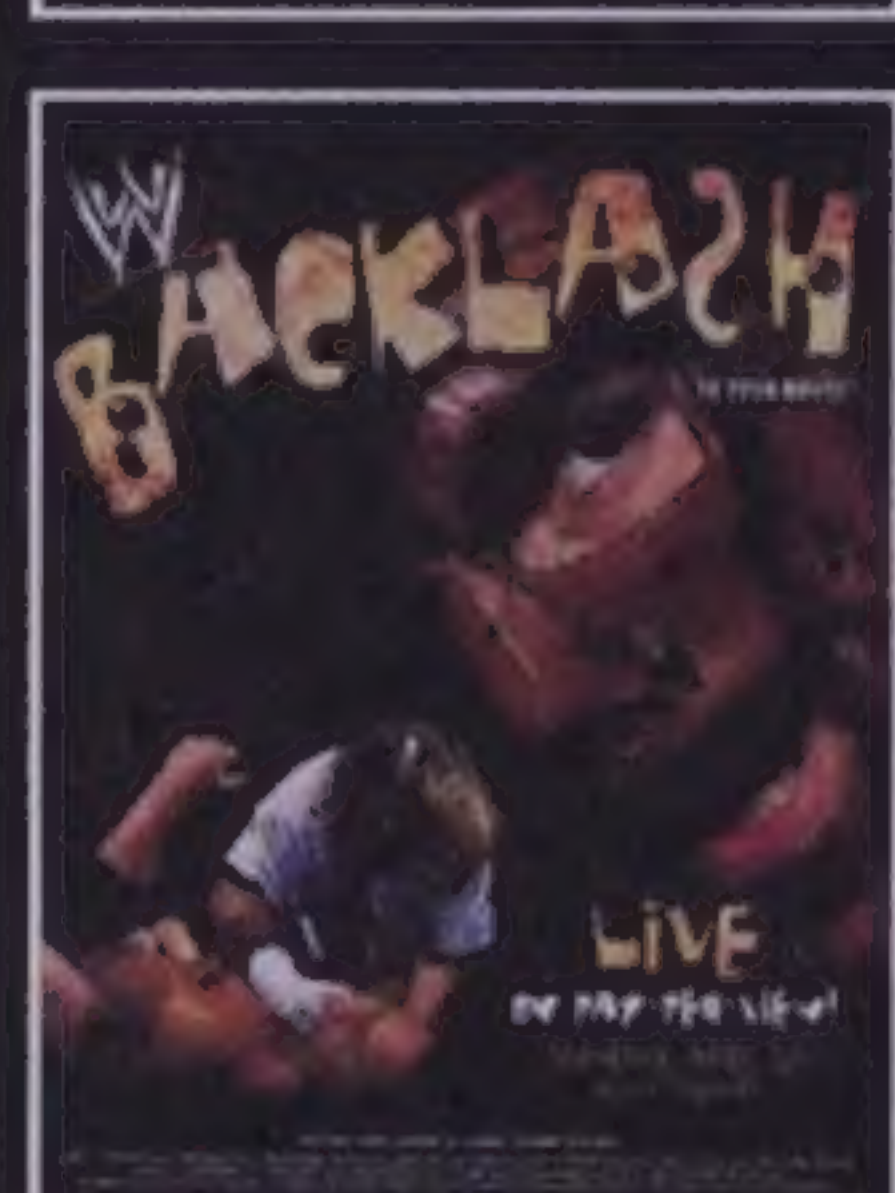
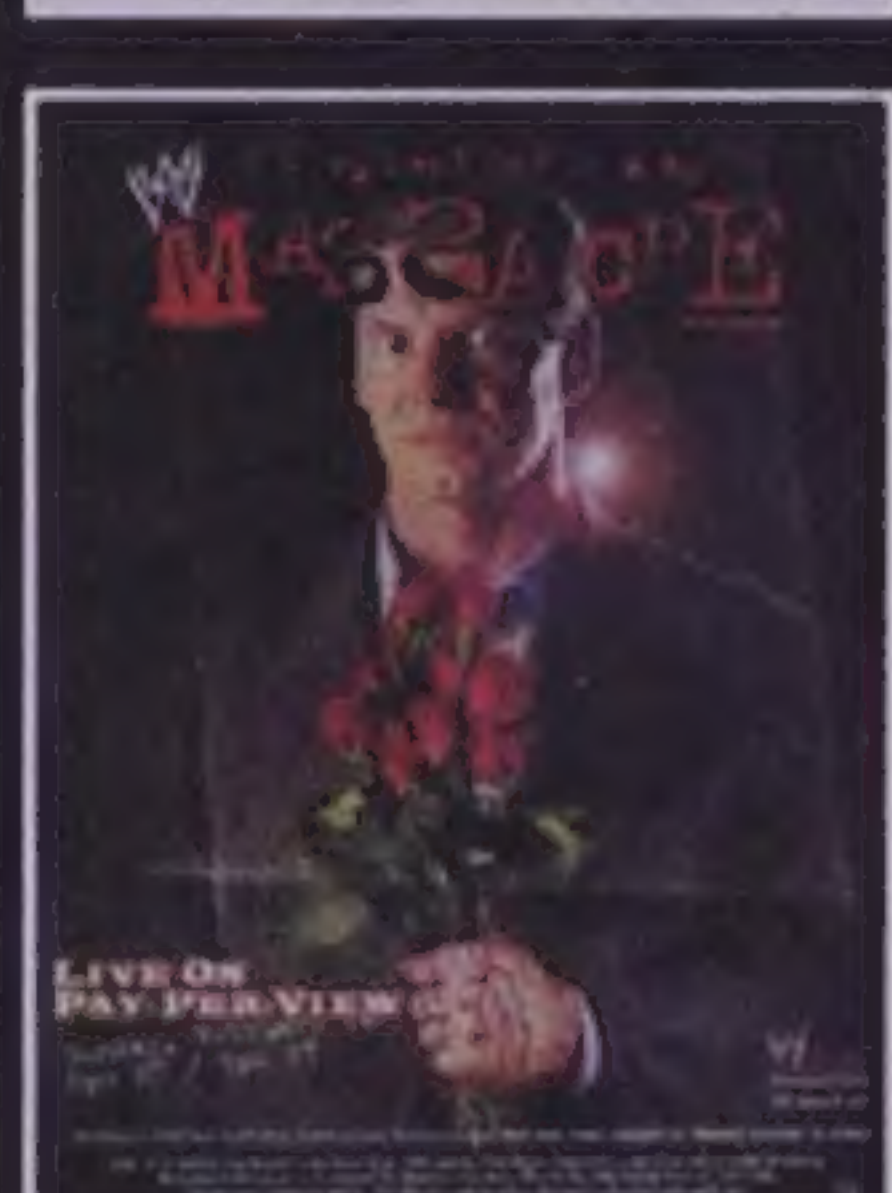
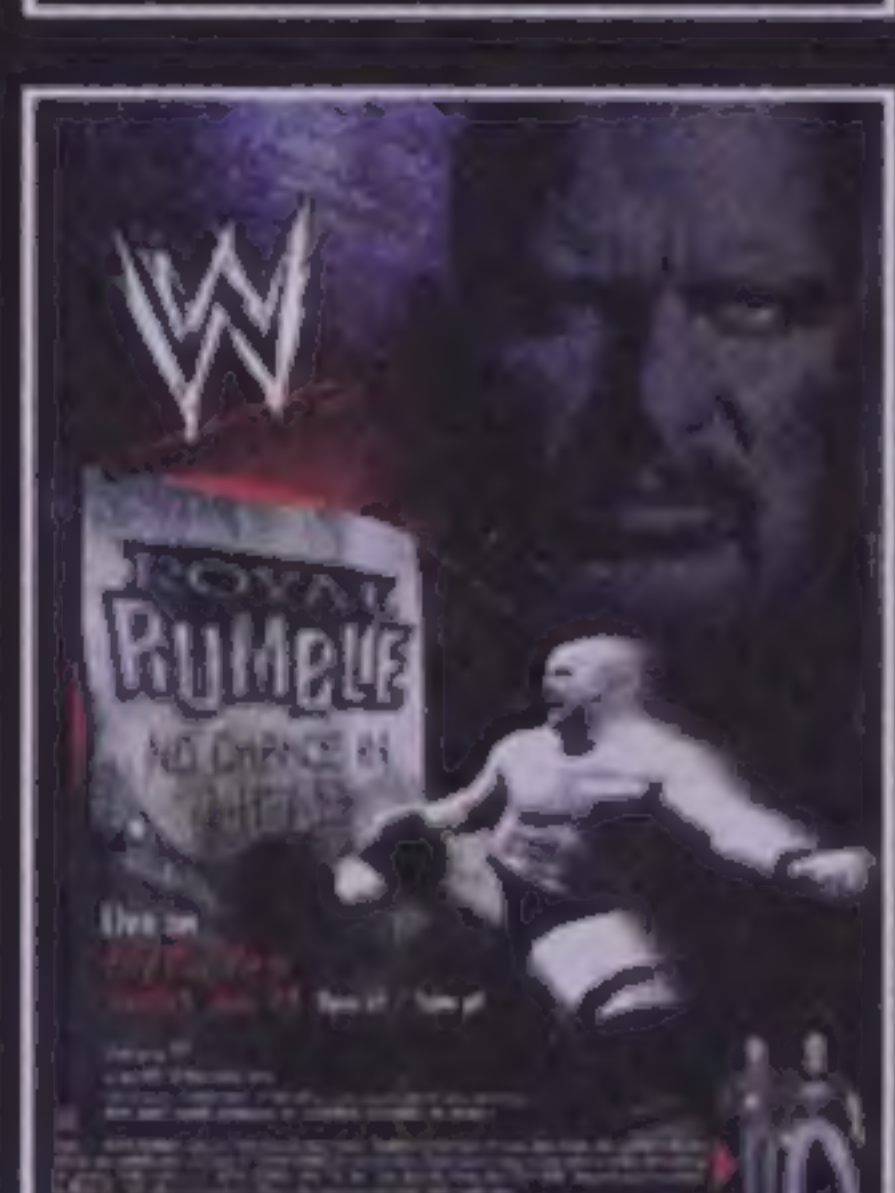
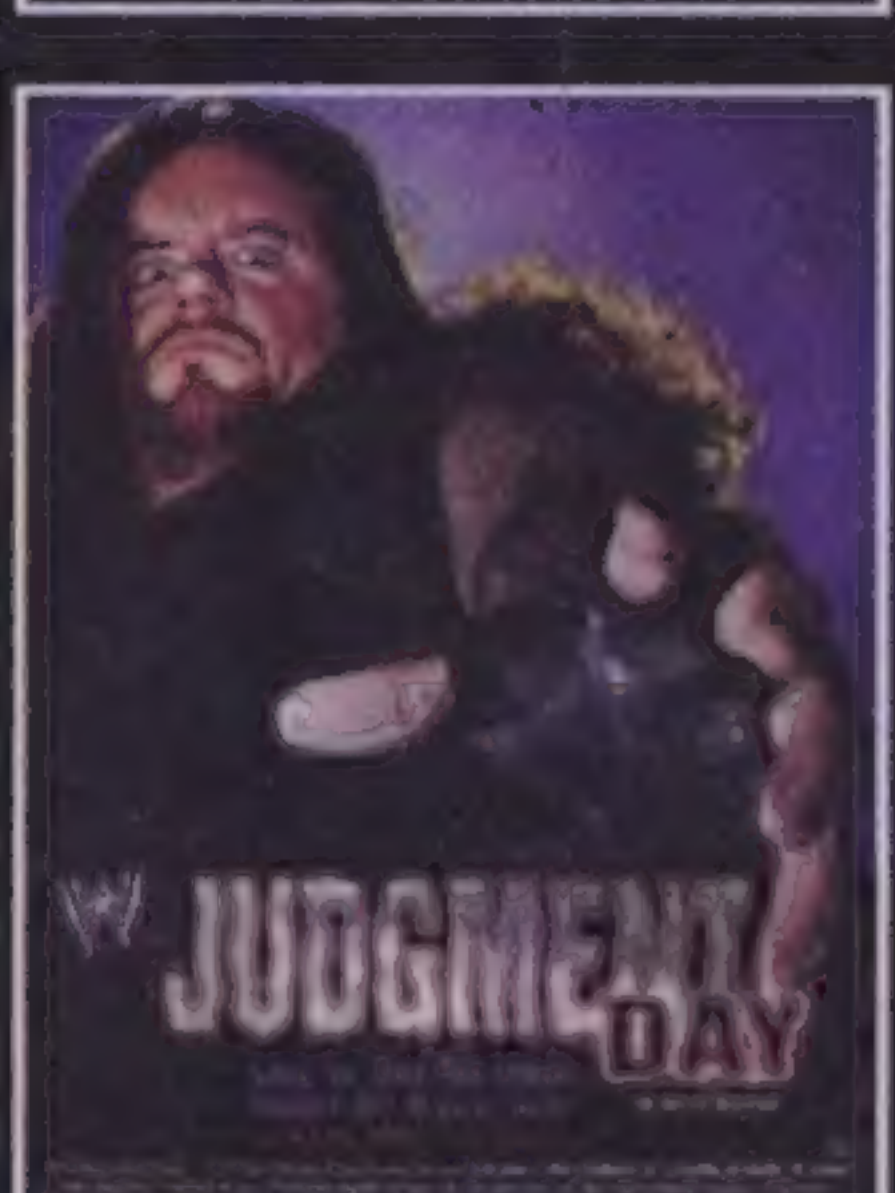
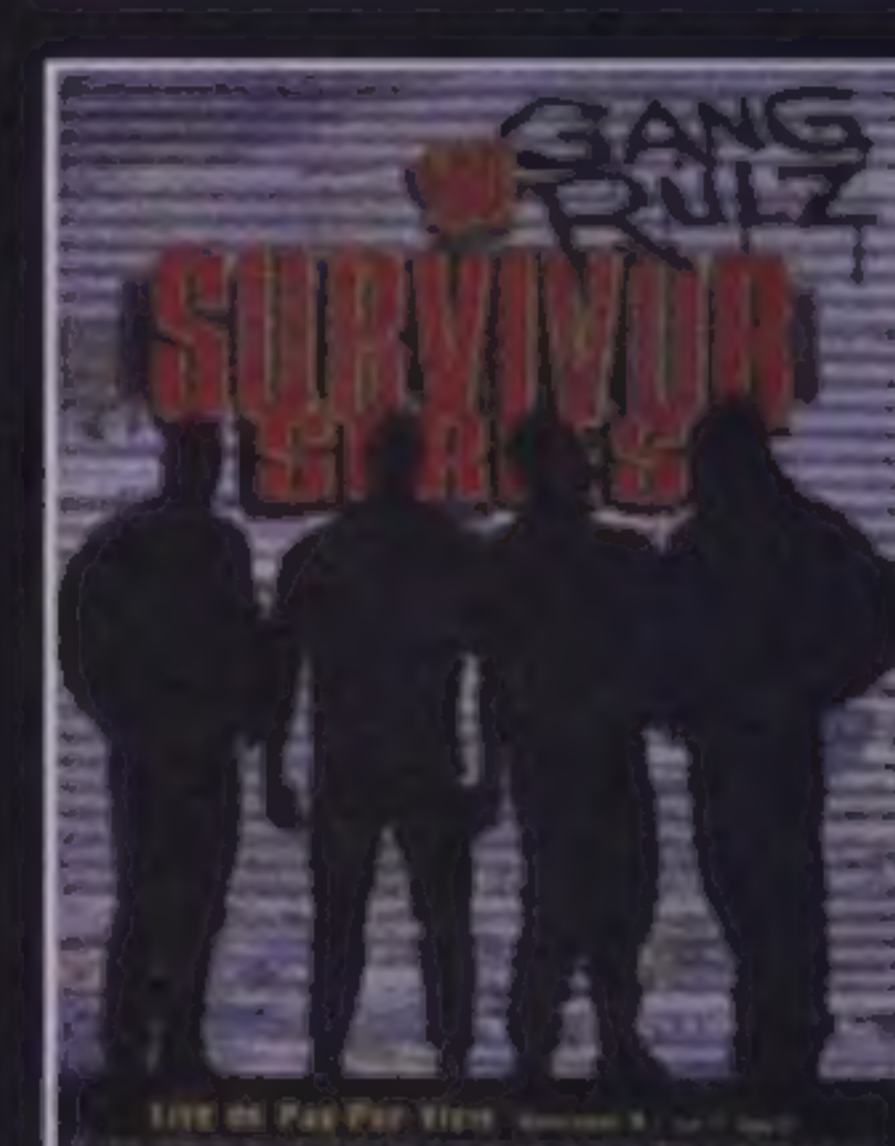
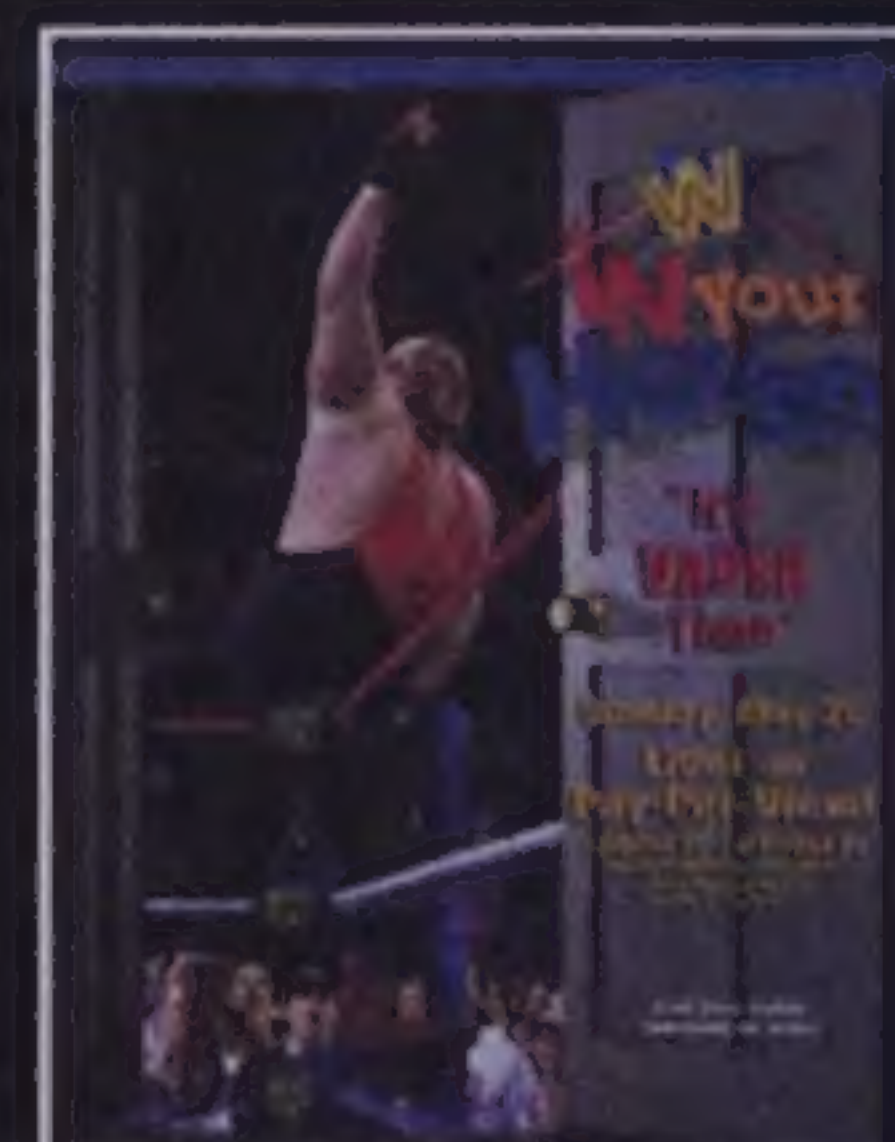
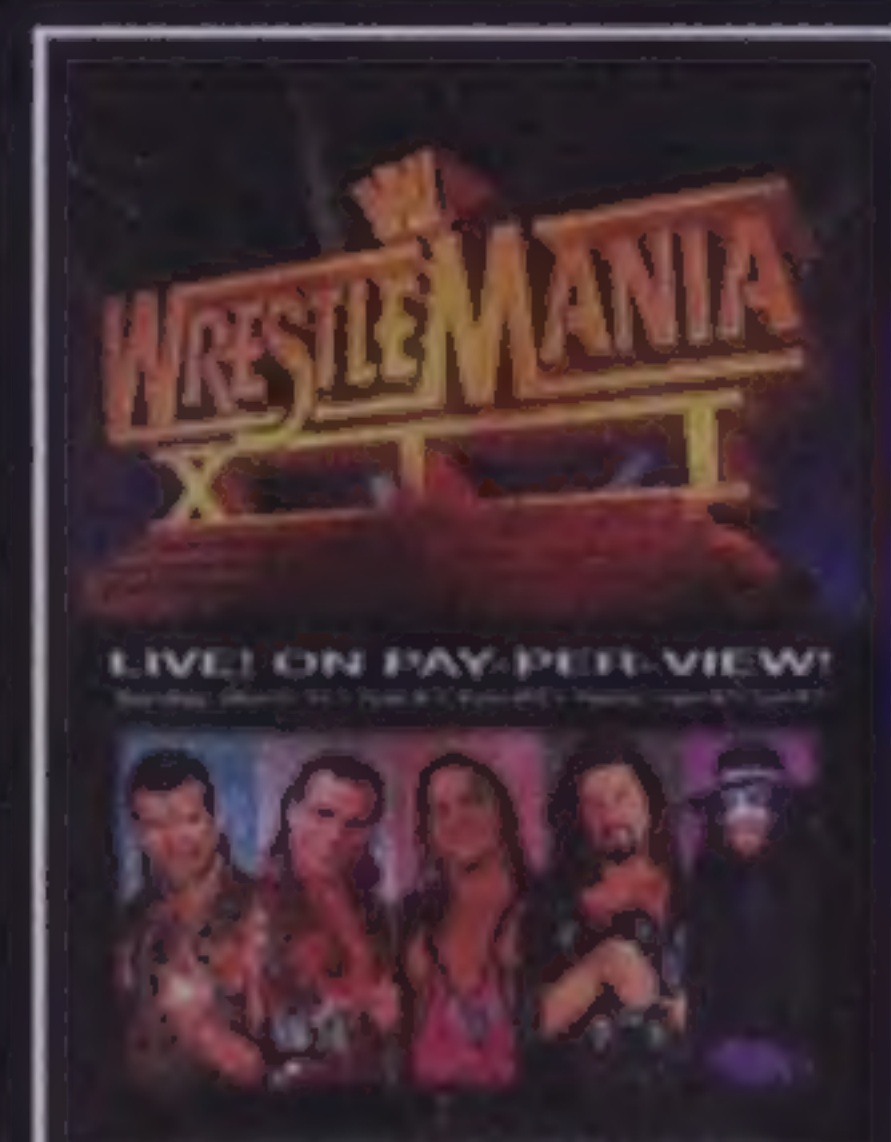
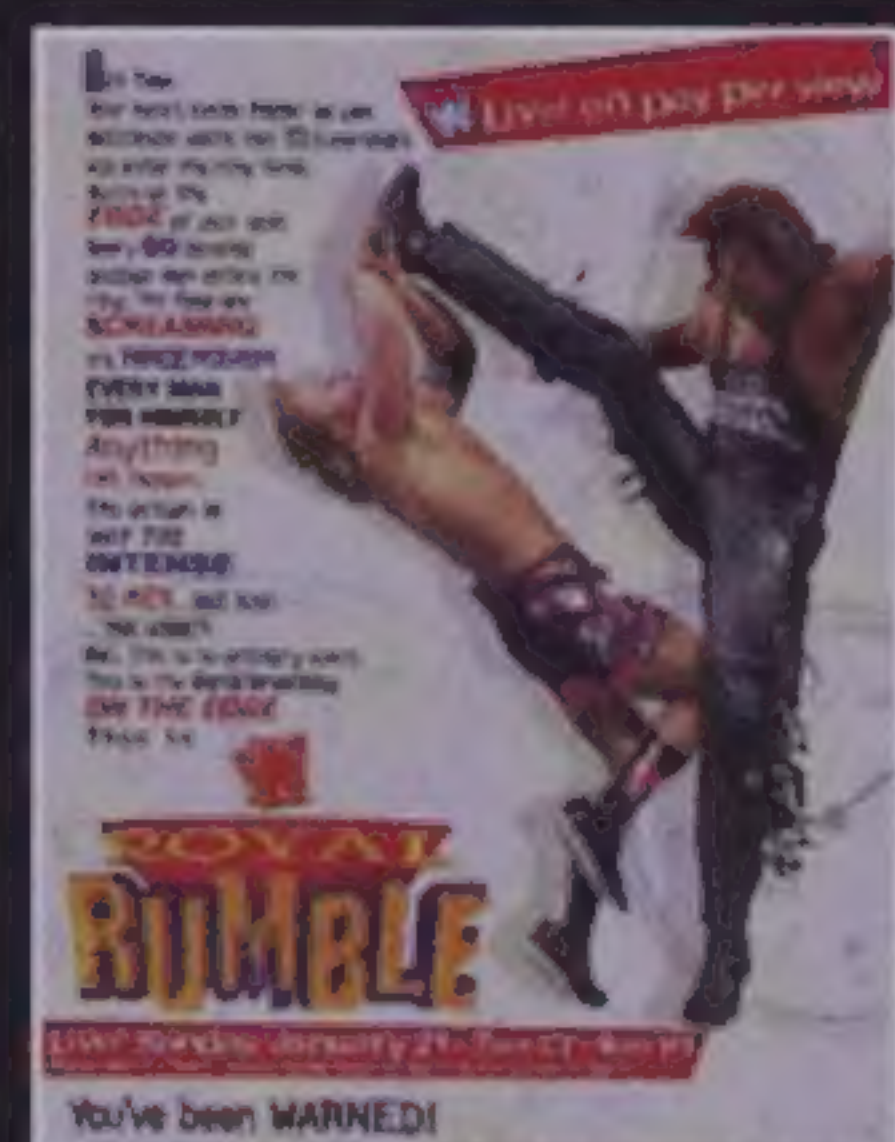
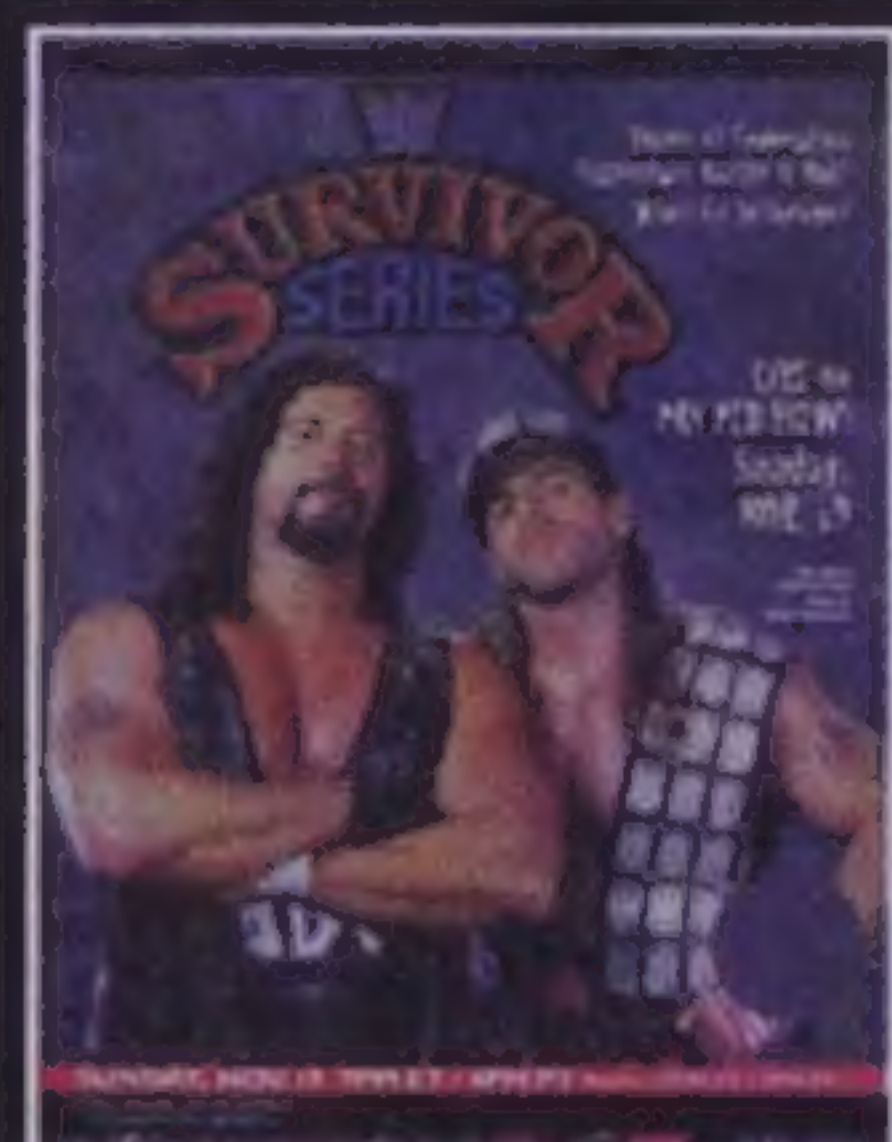
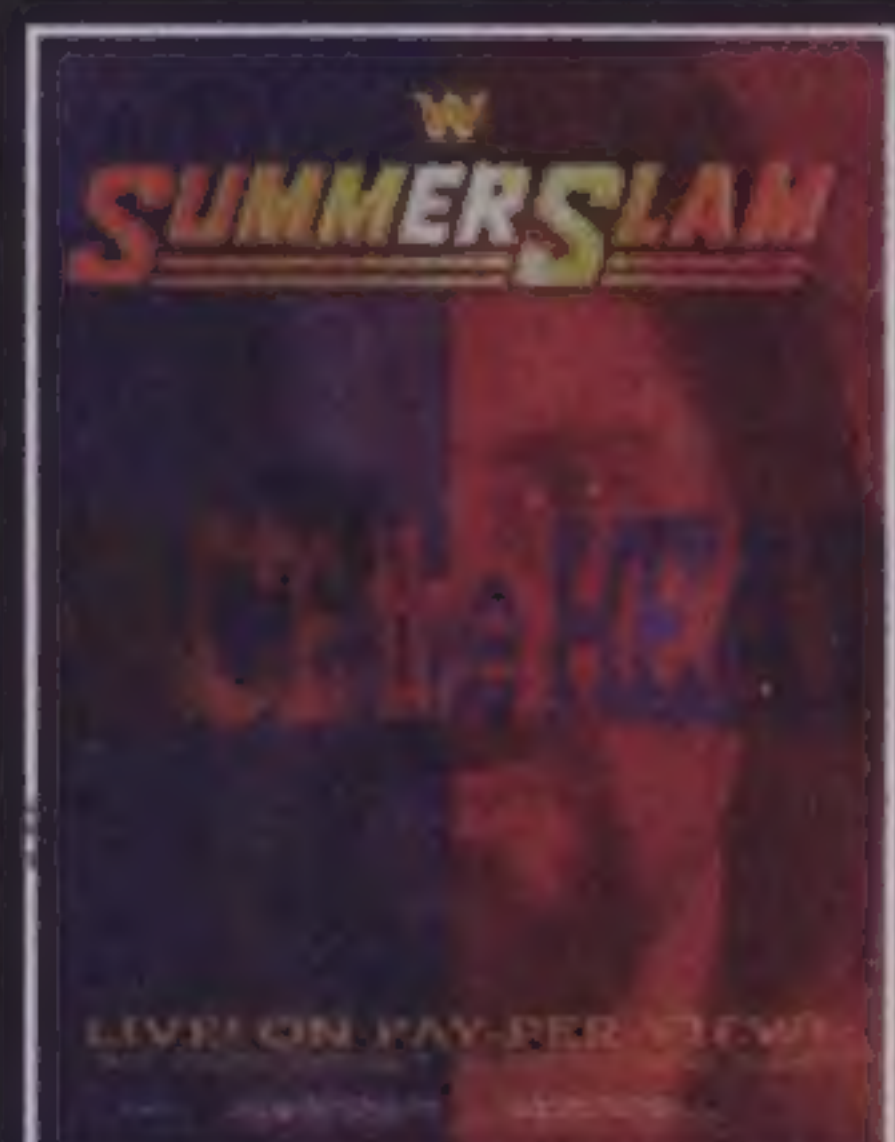
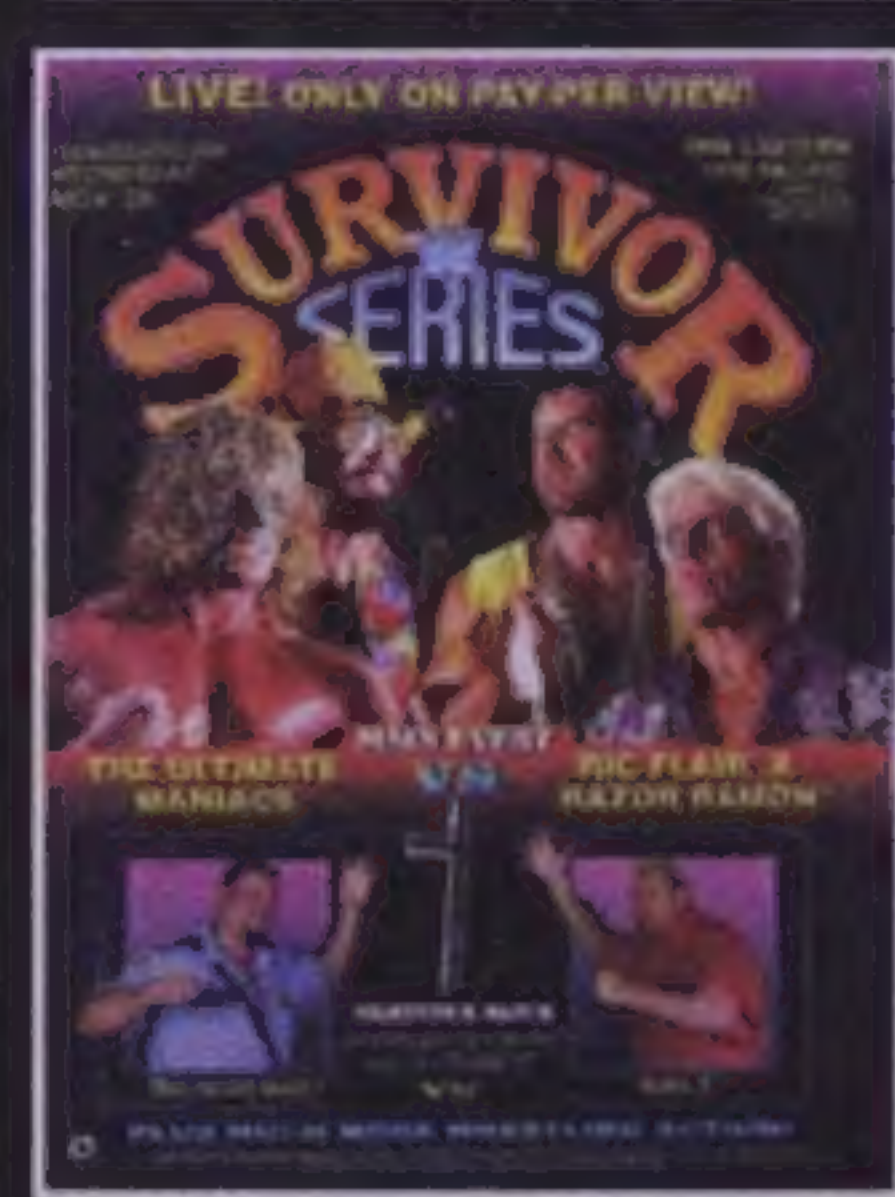
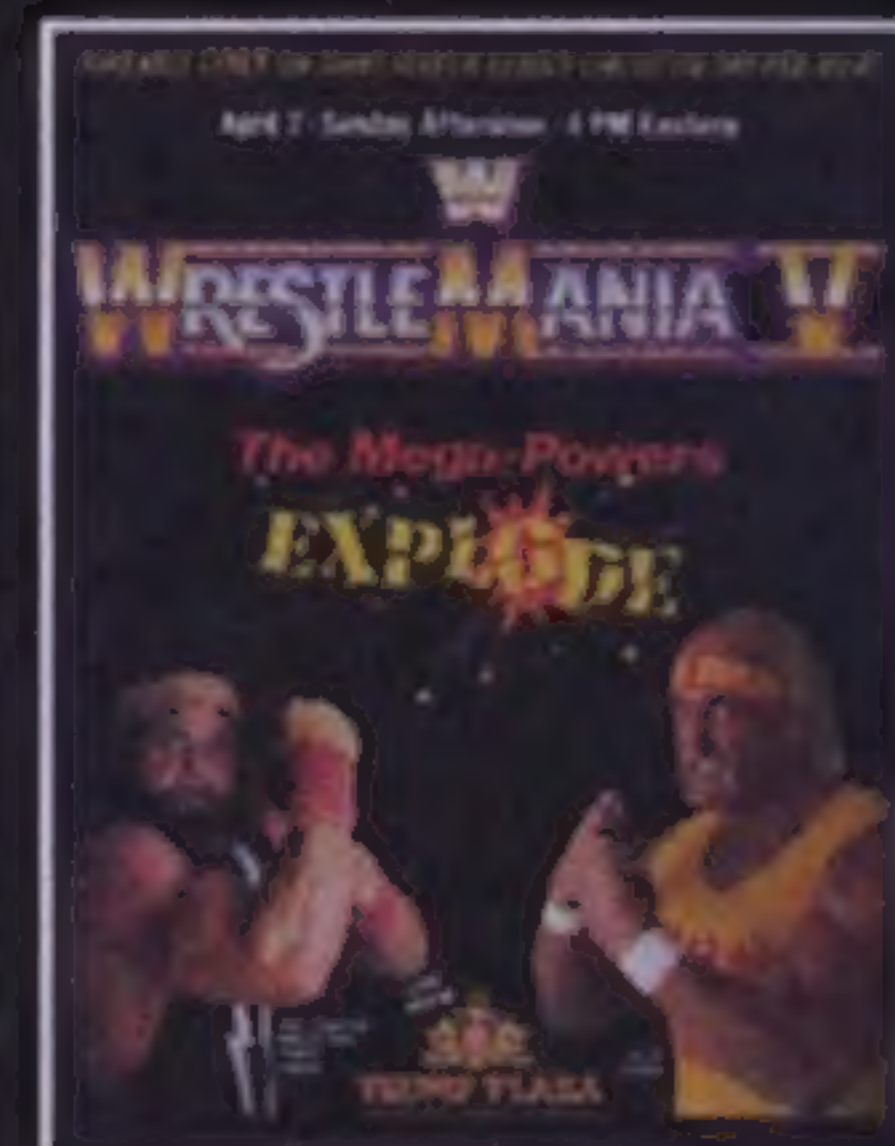
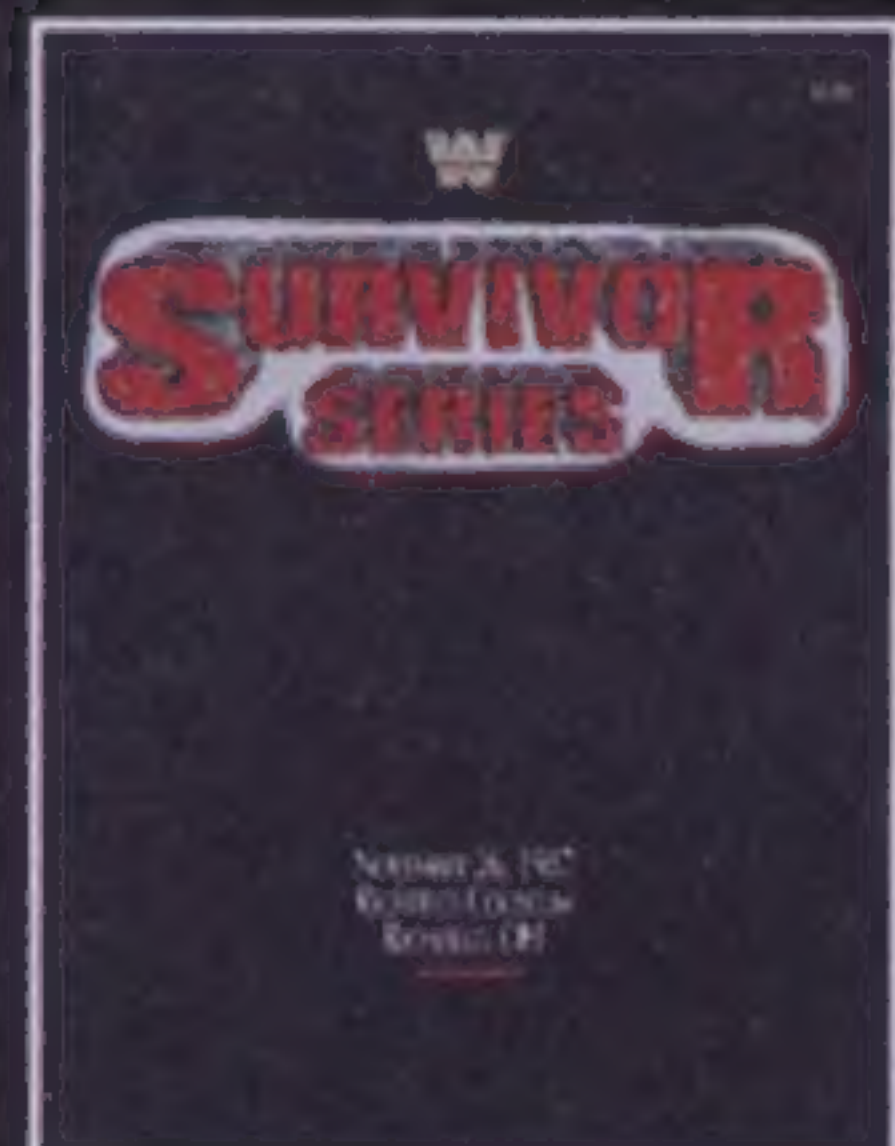
Little did people know that two miles away in the ramshackle Franklin Park Hotel, promoter Vincent J. McMahon pondered the business strategy for an upstart wrestling promotion confined to the northeast region that would one day evolve to define the term sports entertainment. No one, not even McMahon and his inner brain trust, could have envisioned the 50 years that followed.

Today, WWE is proud to present this ultimate chronicle of its first half-century. A global entertainment powerhouse, WWE and its passionate WWE Universe span 150 countries, 30 different languages, and several generations. But the journey was paved with treacherous obstacles, unspeakable controversy and intrepid risk on the way to securing a permanent place in the fabric of Americana. In startling detail, *WWE 50* delivers an unprecedented look into the in-depth story of WWE. With a multitude of interviews and majestic imagery from all eras, no stone is left unturned as we trace the evolution from smoke-filled arenas to sold out stadiums.

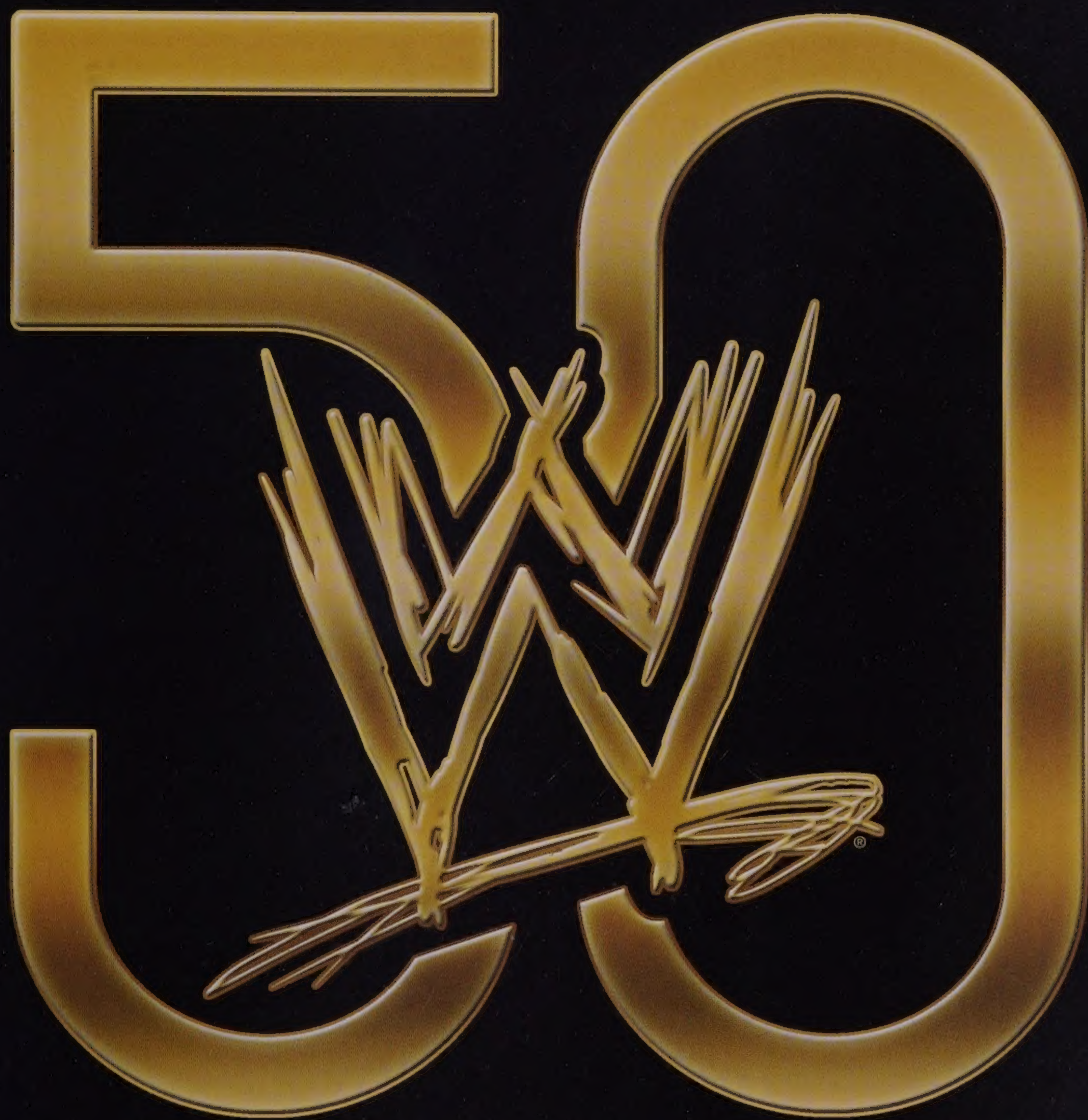
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Written By
Kevin Sullivan



To the WWE Universe—

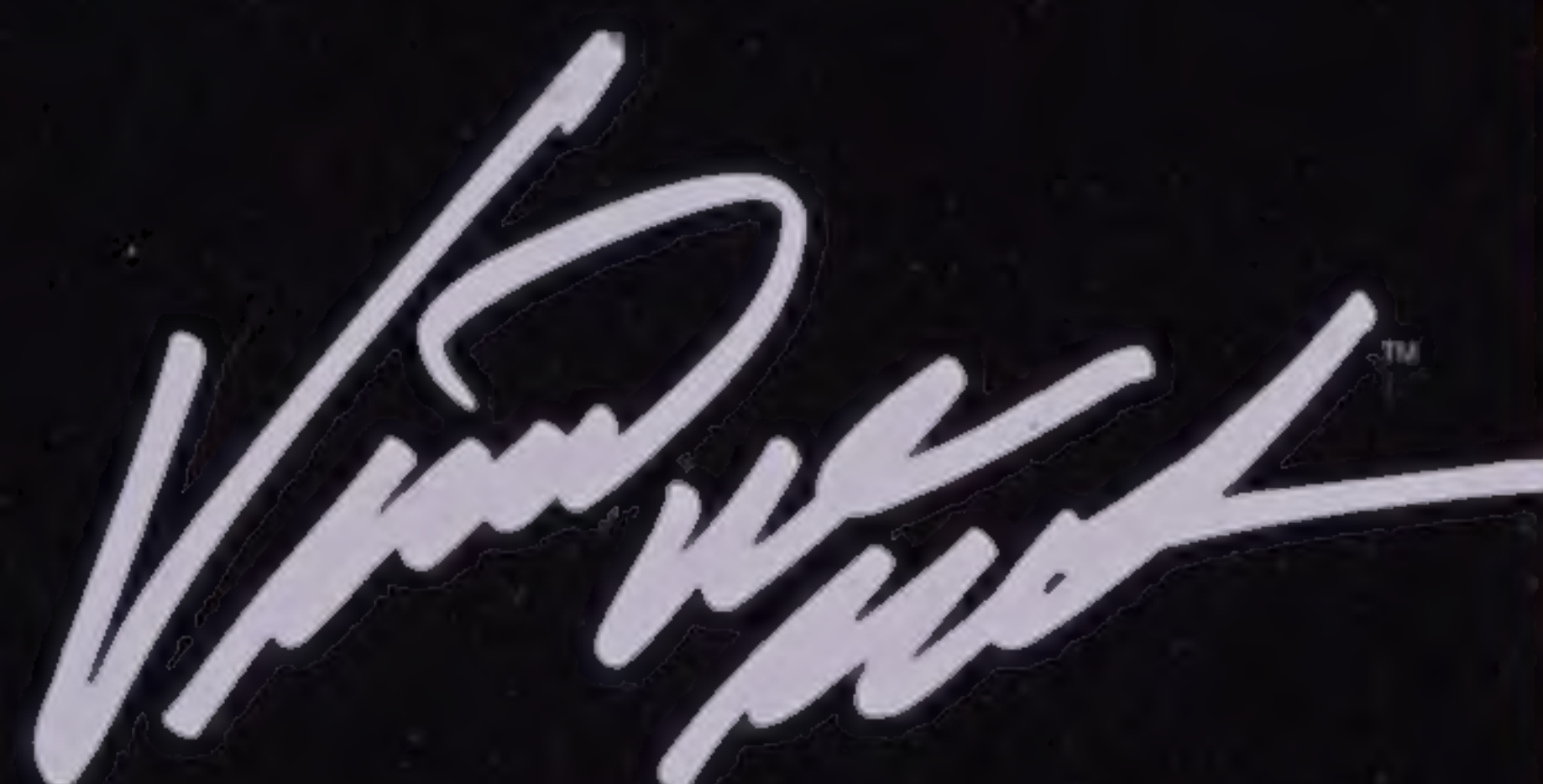
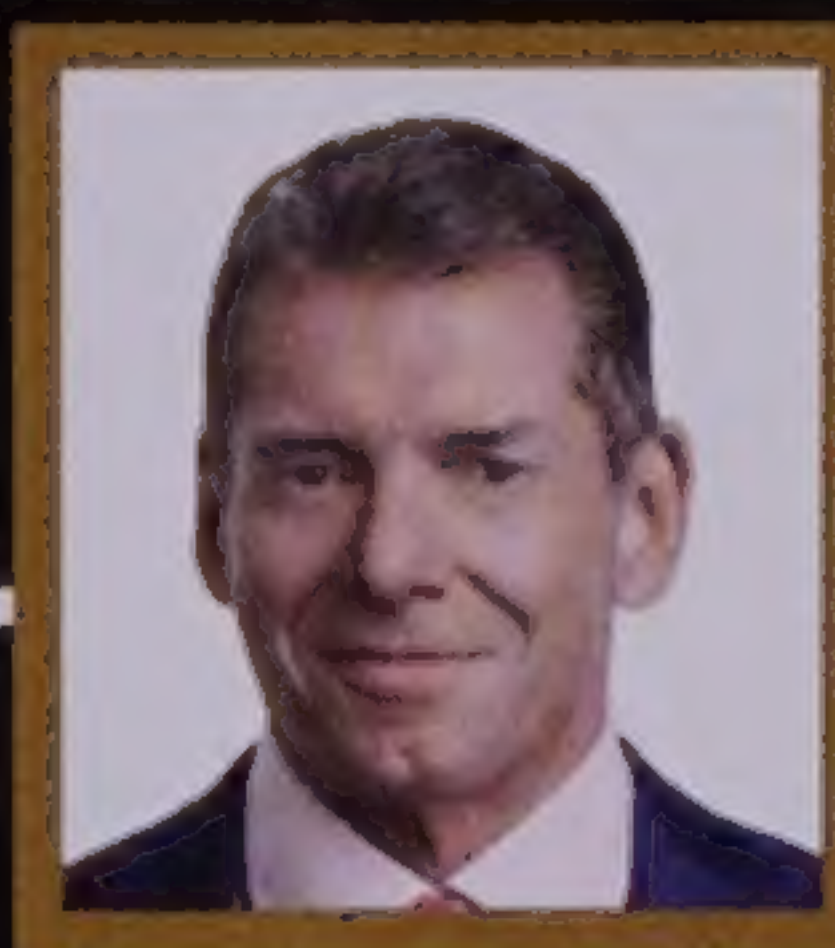
What you are about to read represents my life's work thus far, but I hesitate to call it "work," because I'm a fan and I love what I do. From where I sit, I've never worked a day in my life. Each day brings new challenges, and while some days are more rewarding than others, I thoroughly enjoy every moment.

Our industry has a long and storied tradition and the future of our business is bright. A passion for WWE continues to get passed from one generation to the next creating family bonds and memories that last a lifetime.

In the pages of this book, WWE 50, we invite you to take a look back at the rich history of WWE, from its humble beginnings to the global, pop-culture phenomenon it has become today, and everything in between. Some of you may be reliving memorable moments while others may be experiencing a piece of history for the first time. Either way, we hope it makes you smile.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my father, Vincent J. McMahon and my grandfather, Jess McMahon, who paved the way for what WWE has become, as well as all of the WWE Superstars past and present who have been vital to WWE's success. Most importantly, I would like to thank you, the WWE Universe, for making WWE what it is today.

I hope you enjoy WWE 50. Now it's time for me to get back to "work" on the next 50 years.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in white ink, which appears to read "Vince McMahon".





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BradyGames would like to thank Steve Pantaleo and the rest of the amazing WWE team for all their help and support during this project.

About the Author

A graduate of Fairfield University, Kevin Sullivan began his 15-year sports-entertainment career in 1998 when he accepted a position within WWE. Over the course of the next decade, he played an integral role in WWE.com's content creation process, most recently as the site's Content Director. He also served as managing editor of WWE's Raw Magazine.

Sullivan left WWE on a full-time basis in 2008, but continues to work closely with the company's publishing department. His first book, the *WWE Encyclopedia*, became an instant hit and peaked at No. 8 on the New York Times best sellers list. From there, Sullivan authored *The WWE Championship: A Look Back at the Rich History of the WWE Championship*. The 320-page narrative tracks wrestling's most prestigious prize from its first days in 1963 all the way up to today.

Sullivan also co-authored the second edition of the best-selling *WWE Encyclopedia*, which hit bookshelves in late 2012, and has penned seven children's books for WWE, including biographies on Undertaker, Rey Mysterio, and Big Show.

Follow Sullivan on Twitter: @SullivanBooks

Author Acknowledgements

Completing this book would never have been possible without the patience and assistance of my family, particularly my beautiful wife. Caryn, thank you for supporting me throughout this project. I truly appreciate everything you've done and continue to do to ensure my success and happiness.

The ongoing support I receive from my longtime friends at WWE never ceases to amaze me. Without the following people, WWE 50 would never have become as comprehensive: Steve Pantaleo, Kieran Bent, Ben Brown, Mike Archer, Basil DeVito, Jill Davidson DeNota, Mike Calabrese, Chris Chambers, Sue Derosa-Cundari, Lea Girard, Frank Vitucci, Mark Carrano, Jennifer Barry-Dean, Howard Finkel, and Joey Styles.

Each time I pick up a book I worked on with DK Publishing, I feel a strong sense of pride, thanks in large part to the hard work put in by the DK team. I only supply the words; these are the men and women who make those words pop off the page, complete with an unparalleled level of amazing design: Mike Degler, Leigh Davis, Jennifer Sims, Tim Fitzpatrick, Ken Schmidt, Katie Hemlock, and Tracy Wehmeyer.

Finally, as I celebrate my tenth book in publication, I'd like to thank the following people that have helped my development along the way: Dean Miller, Phil Speer, Arda Ocal, Jerome Preisler, Rick Bogner, Brian Shields, Lou DiPietro, Shane McMahon, Jim Monsees, John Cerilli, Mike McAvennie, Craig Tello, Michael Spirito, Michael Cupo, Adam Kirshner, Joe & Lorraine Sullivan, Amy Disabella, Libbey Sullivan, and Kyle Sullivan.

WWE Acknowledgements

WWE 50 represents the collaborative effort of countless hard working individuals, innumerable to name and unequalled in dedication. From WWE headquarters, to the TV studio, to the tireless men and women who travel the globe to bring our unique brand of entertainment to the masses, all have played a role in in taking *WWE 50* from concept to reality. We hope that our passionate fans, the WWE Universe, are as proud to hold WWE's history in their hands as we are to carry on the tradition.

Handling a project this challenging requires a top notch partner. In DK and BradyGames, we have found just that. No task is too daunting and nothing is impossible for the talented professionals that we have entrusted with our history. Their ability to bring words and imagery to life is unmatchedable, and the proof is in the pages that follow. We look forward to having them on board as we continue our mission to keep WWE history alive on bookshelves around the world for years to come.

Lastly, we would like to thank Kevin Sullivan, a walking WWE Encyclopedia, whose knowledge and vision made him the perfect driving force behind this book.

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IN THE BEGINNING

CAPITOL WRESTLING

Today's WWE is globally recognized as a respected leader in the entertainment industry. Headquartered in Stamford, Connecticut, the publicly-traded company staffs more than 600 full-time employees in offices all over the world, including New York, Los Angeles, Miami, London, Mumbai, Shanghai, Singapore, Istanbul, and Tokyo. In the beginning, however, WWE was simply a small regional promotion that focused all its efforts on promoting wrestling events in the Northeast United States. Its evolution into an iconic American brand took place over the course of the past five decades. To fully comprehend its historic fifty-year journey, it's important to first gain an understanding of sports-entertainment's most influential family: the McMahons.



Long before Vince McMahon made his mark in the sports-entertainment business, his grandfather, Roderick James McMahon, had established himself as a prominent figure in the boxing world during the 1920s and 1930s. Affectionately known as “Jess,” McMahon served as a promoter and matchmaker for many historic venues, including Ebbets Field in Brooklyn and Manhattan's famed Madison Square Garden.

Along the way, McMahon also promoted wrestling cards in New York, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania until his passing in November 1954. All the while, Jess' son, Vincent James McMahon, watched intently, absorbing an invaluable firsthand education on how to become a successful promoter. But before Vincent James could make a name for himself, he was shipped to North Carolina to serve in the Coast Guard during World War II.

Upon completing his service in 1946, the younger McMahon was eager to pick up where he left off. The only problem was that during his time in the military, successful promoter Joseph “Toots” Mondt had gained momentum in the New York territory, forcing McMahon to find another region to resume his promoting career.



Vincent J. McMahon

McMahon eventually settled into Washington, D.C., where he began managing Turner's Arena in 1947. With McMahon calling the shots, the arena began attracting top stars from nearly every genre, including Nat King Cole, Louis Armstrong, Gorgeous George, and Bruno Sammartino. McMahon eventually assumed full control of the venue's lease in 1954 and subsequently renamed it Capitol Arena to coincide with his new wrestling promotion, Capitol Wrestling Corporation.

Shortly after its formation, Capitol Wrestling joined the National Wrestling Alliance, a governing body that bonded numerous promotions throughout the nation. At the time, the NWA was recognized as the most powerful organization in all of wrestling, largely due to its traveling champion. Unlike regional champions, who only reigned over their respective territories, the NWA World Heavyweight Champion defended his title in various NWA territories throughout the nation, which gave the title a level of credibility and prestige absent from regional championships.



Capitol Wrestling Corporation Logo

Around the same time as Capitol Wrestling's advent, television started to become a widely-accessed form of entertainment across the country. Despite the new medium's popularity, however, wrestling promoters largely frowned at the notion of putting their product on TV, fearing that allowing fans to watch from home would hurt attendance at live events. McMahon disagreed.

In 1956, McMahon convinced the then-popular Dumont Television Network to carry Capitol Wrestling for two weeks. During this period, McMahon assumed all financial responsibility for the airing of the show, which was a clear risk, but one which eventually paid off. On the third week, Dumont signed Capitol Wrestling to a two-year contract and began paying McMahon \$350 per week for the rights to air the popular wrestling program. Subsequently, Gunther Beer was quickly brought on board as the show's sponsor, and, much to the surprise of other promoters, attendance for the live events began to spike.

"It's television," McMahon told *The Washington Post* and *Times Herald* in 1956 when asked about his increase in live attendance. "What else could it be? We are getting reservation orders from as far north as Chambersberg, Pennsylvania, and as far south as Staunton, Virginia."

As the year marched on, television allowed viewers to sample Capitol Wrestling as far north as the coveted New York market. Coincidentally, around the same time, Mondt was serving a six-month suspension handed down by the New York State Athletic Commission for failure to honor bookings of his wrestlers in other territories. This allowed Capitol Wrestling to promote its first-ever show at Madison Square Garden on November 26, 1956.



Joseph "Toots" Mondt



Dr. Jerry Graham



Johnny Valentine



The Fabulous Kangaroos

Once the MSG crowd got a taste of McMahon's product, there was no hope for Mondt. The athleticism and showmanship of Dr. Jerry Graham, Johnny Valentine, The Fabulous Kangaroos, and the rest of Capitol Wrestling's roster was just too much to overcome. By 1960, McMahon had emerged as the ultimate victor in the battle for Northeast supremacy.

Following the fight for the Northeast, McMahon shocked the wrestling world when he welcomed his former foe, Mondt, into the Capitol Wrestling fold (a similar scene would play out four decades later when Vincent K. McMahon welcomed longtime rival Eric Bischoff into WWE). Together, McMahon and Mondt enjoyed many successes, but their most important was undoubtedly the acquisition of Buddy Rogers.



With more than forty championship reigns to his credit, the original "Nature Boy" drew sellout crowds all over the world. Once his booking rights became the property of McMahon, all those sellout crowds became Capitol Wrestling's sellout crowds. The combination of Rogers' drawing ability and the promotion's powerful position on television helped establish the Northeast as the preeminent territory in all of wrestling.

*Wrestling's
Top Attraction!*

**NATURE BOY
BUDDY
ROGERS
THE
HEAVYWEIGHT
CHAMPION
OF
THE WORLD**

please look inside ▶



THE NWA CHAMPIONSHIP

In June 1961, Capitol Wrestling partnered with Chicago's Fred Kohler to promote a match that would eventually become recognized as one of the most definitive turning points in wrestling history: Buddy Rogers versus NWA Champion Pat O'Connor. In front of more than 38,000 fans at Comiskey Park, Rogers captured the prestigious title, putting an end to O'Connor's two-and-a-half year reign at the top.

Rogers' victory sent a wave of excitement over the NWA and its promoters, who assumed they would now have the opportunity to promote wrestling's top draw on their cards. McMahon, however, had other plans.

With full control over where and when Rogers would compete, McMahon ensured that the "Nature Boy" was booked nearly exclusively in his territory. This unconventional style of booking an NWA Champion puzzled other promoters, who could do little but watch as Capitol Wrestling benefited from Rogers' amazing star power.

Pat O'Connor



"Nature Boy" Buddy Rogers



Lou Thesz

Finally, after more than a year-and-a-half of limited access to the NWA Champion, a group of discouraged NWA promoters led by the St. Louis territory's Sam Muchnick decided it was time for Rogers' stranglehold on the gold to come to an end, and began searching for a new flag bearer for their organization. They eventually settled on the always-reliable Lou Thesz, who emerged from retirement in January 1963 to take the gold from Rogers, much to the delight of NWA promoters across the country. Rogers' loss, however, did very little to slow McMahon's amazing momentum. Over the course of Rogers' nineteen months on top, Capitol Wrestling established itself as the nation's most dominant promotion, both at the ticket window and on television. In reality, Capitol Wrestling had outgrown its affiliation with the NWA and was about to embark on the greatest journey in wrestling history.

**Vincent J. McMahon**

My dad had an office at 1332 I Street in North West Washington, D.C., at the Franklin Park Hotel (room 751). And it was a dump. But there was a coffee shop on the first floor, and I loved the coffee shop. I loved the cheeseburgers. I loved the milkshakes, and I loved going to my dad's office because he had a smaller office connected and that's where I would go and make matches and things of that nature. Then I'd bring them over and show him the matches I had made, which I'm sure were laughable at the time. But these were some wonderful memories I had of that office.

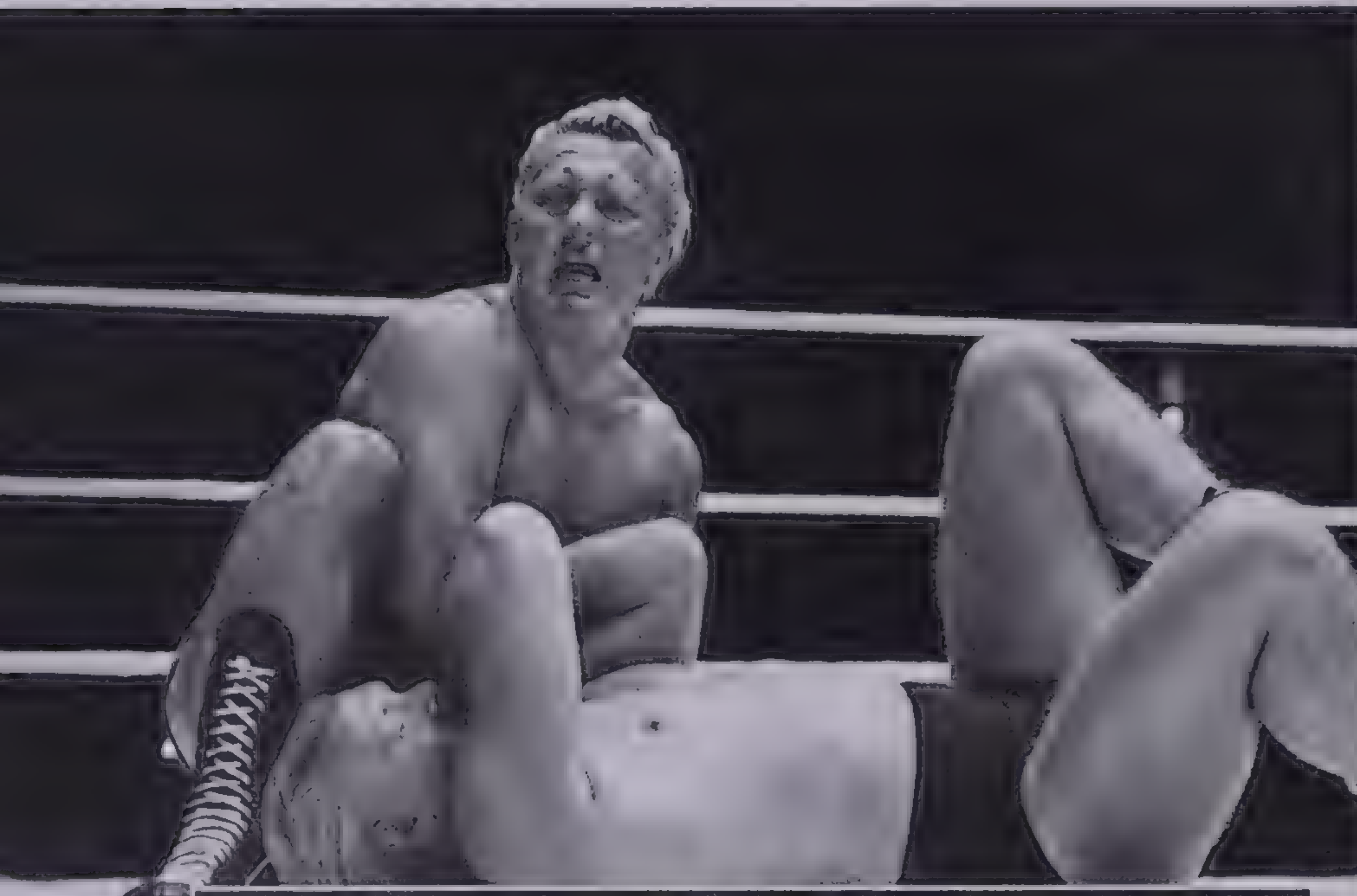


— Vincent K. McMahon, WWE Chairman & CEO

CWC WRESTLERS

BUDDY ROGERS

With more than forty championships to his name, Buddy Rogers was one of the most accomplished stars of his—and he knew it. The original “Nature Boy” regularly strutted around arenas with an egotistical swagger that infuriated fans.



SKULL MURPHY

Behind the power of his chest-caving heart punch, Skull Murphy became one of the most feared competitors of the 1950s and 1960s.





DR. JERRY GRAHAM

As the kingpin of the famous Graham family, Dr. Jerry Graham is responsible for helping launch the careers of many notable Superstars, including WWE Hall of Famers Superstar Billy Graham and Eddie Graham.

EDDIE GRAHAM

Prior to becoming a legend in Florida, Eddie Graham teamed with Jerry Graham to capture four United States Tag Team Championship reigns.



ARNOLD SKAALAND

Affectionately referred to as "The Golden Boy," Arnold Skaaland was one of very few men who succeeded at wrestling, managing, and promoting.



THE FABULOUS KANGAROOS

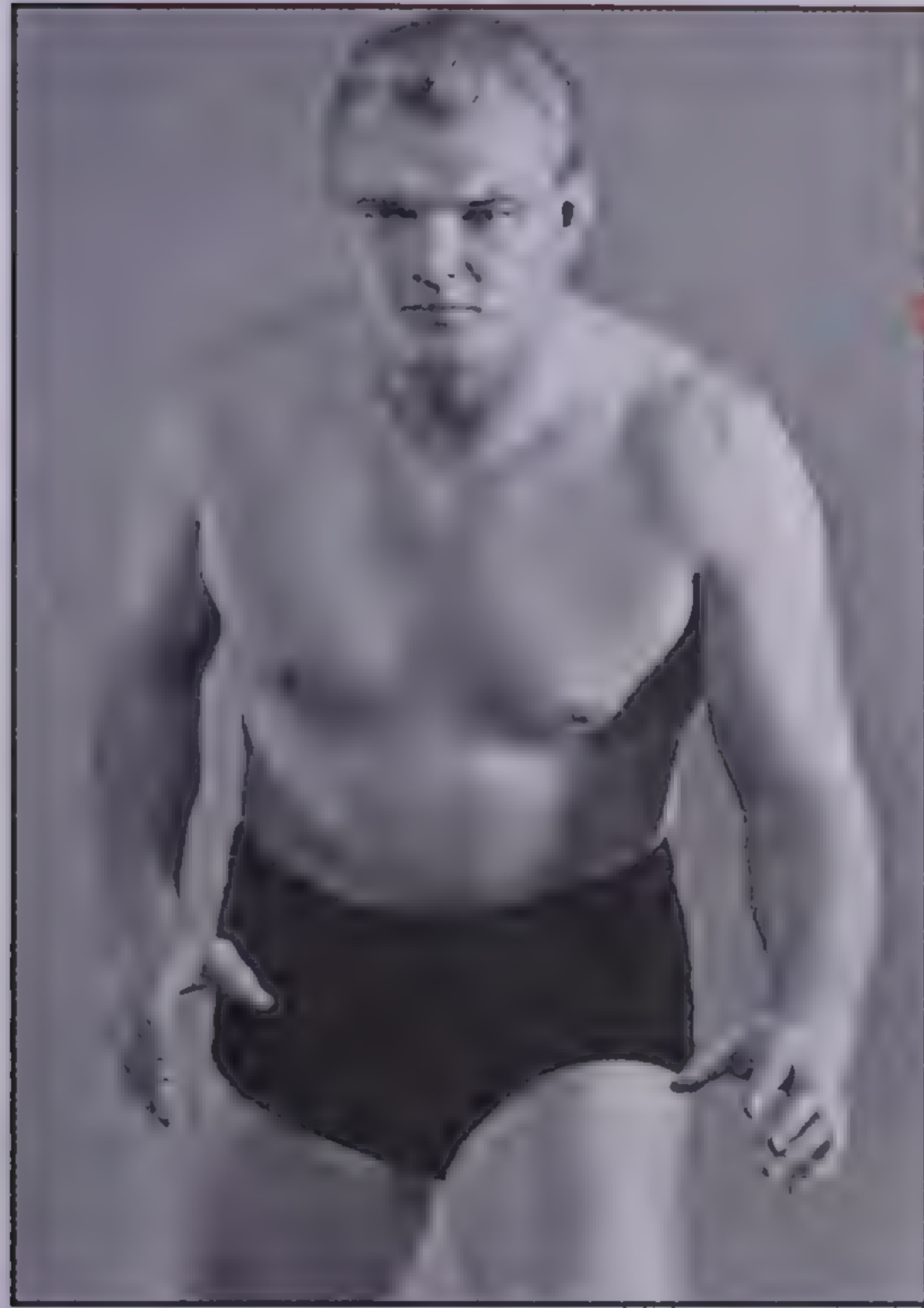
Managed by Wild Red Berry, Al Costello and Roy Heffernan are considered by many to be the team that popularized tag-team wrestling in the United States. Combined, their three U.S. Tag Team Title reigns lasted nearly a year and a half.



RED BASTIEN

Alongside his brother Lou, Red Bastien used his flawless aerial skill to help capture three United States Tag Team Championship reigns in 1960.





JOHNNY VALENTINE

Father of WWE Hall of Famer Greg "The Hammer" Valentine, Johnny Valentine began his career in Argentina in 1947. Soon after, he transferred his talents to the United States, where he became one of the business' greatest draws.



BRUNO SAMMARTINO

Before becoming the cornerstone of WWE in 1963, Bruno Sammartino briefly competed for Capitol Wrestling. He quickly became a main eventer, selling out Madison Square Garden with partner Antonino Rocca.

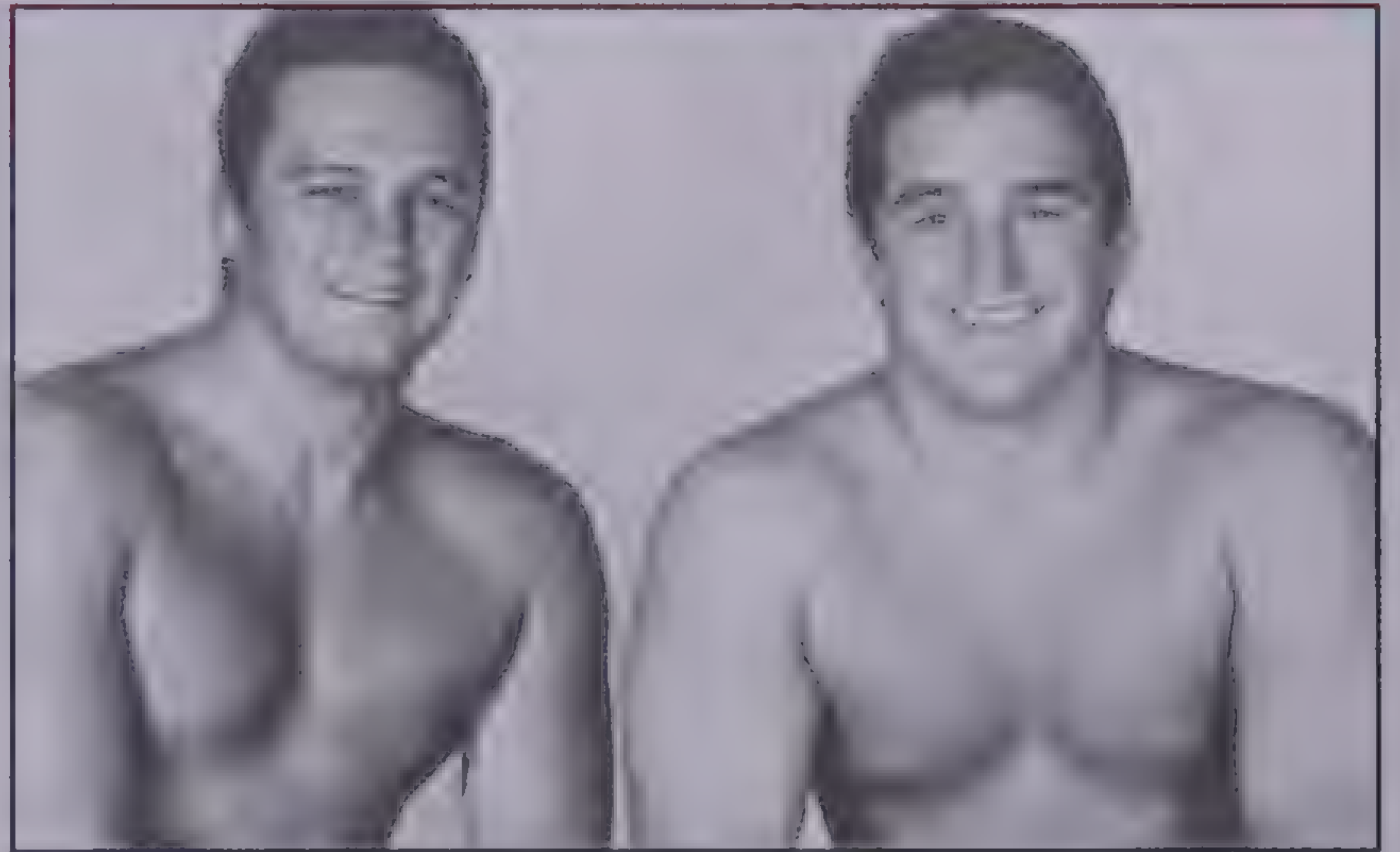
HAYSTACKS CALHOUN

At 601 pounds, Haystacks Calhoun was a mountain of a man who was impossible to slam.



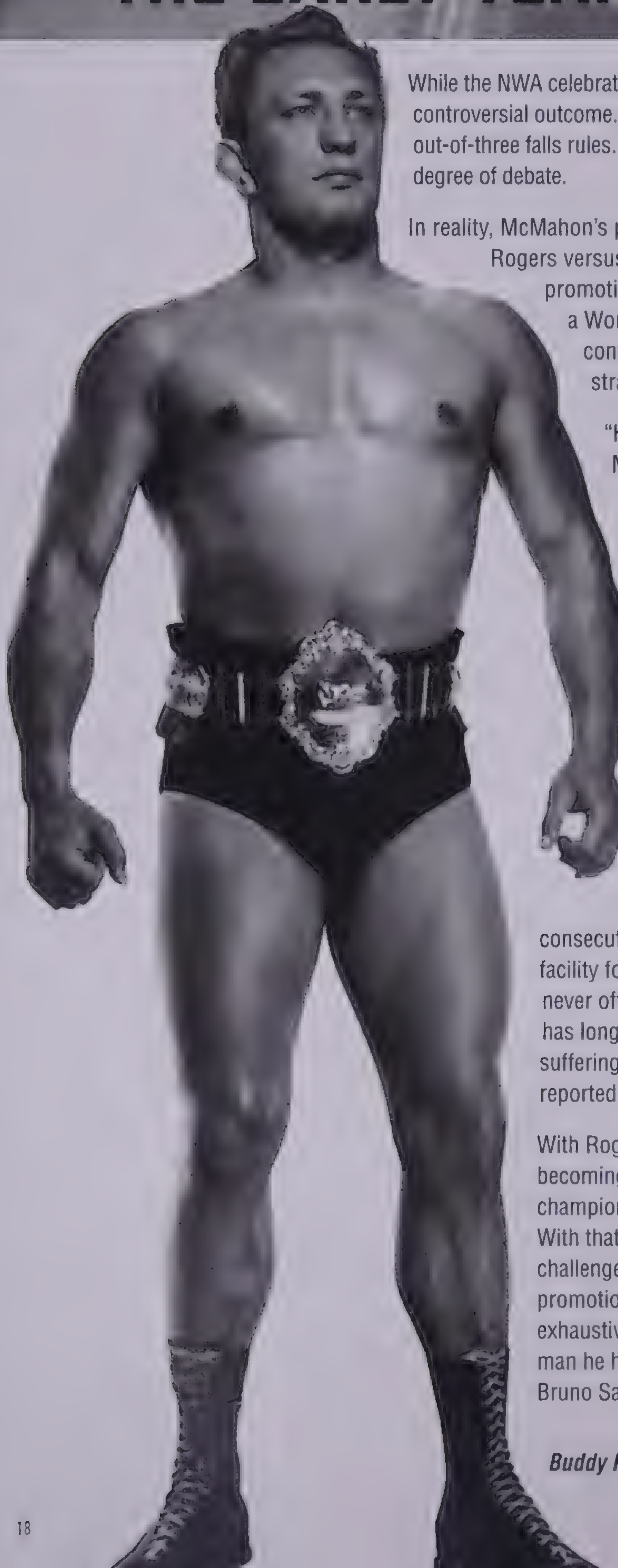
THE LEWIN BROTHERS

A former bodybuilder, Donn Lewin teamed with his enigmatic brother, Mark, through much of the 1960s. Their undeniable chemistry and success led to the brothers from New York becoming mainstays in the Capitol Wrestling Corporation tag-team scene.



WORLD WIDE

THE EARLY YEARS



While the NWA celebrated Lou Thesz's victory over Buddy Rogers, Vincent J. McMahon was busy protesting the match's controversial outcome. During the 1960s, it was common for World Championship matches to be contested under two-out-of-three falls rules. But Thesz's triumph over Rogers occurred in a simple one-fall contest, which presented a palpable degree of debate.

In reality, McMahon's protest was nothing more than a symbolic gesture. He used the controversial conclusion to Rogers versus Thesz as the excuse he needed to break away from the NWA and form his own standalone promotion that wasn't restricted by a parent organization's bylaws and didn't rely on the sharing of a World Champion for it to succeed. In the years leading up to the controversial Thesz-Rogers contest, McMahon had proven that his organization was far stronger than the NWA, and strategically chose this pivotal moment in time to reap the full benefits of his success.

"He knew what he wanted to do; he wanted his own World Champion," remembers Vincent K. McMahon. "Back in those days, back in the territory system, almost every territory had a world champion, except only one was recognized by the National Wrestling Alliance. My dad wanted his own."

In April 1963, McMahon launched the present-day WWE with his hand-picked champion, Buddy Rogers, leading the way. With a major draw such as the "Nature Boy" at the top, coupled with the organization's strong presence on television, the young promotion appeared to have the credibility of which other startups could only dream. But unfortunately, Rogers' health failed to cooperate.

Rogers began to feel intense pain in his chest toward the beginning of 1963, but rather than seek medical attention, he continued to compete through the extreme physical discomfort. Then on April 16, while in Ottawa to battle Bulldog Brower, Rogers' pain finally forced him to go to the hospital. It was the first of three consecutive days that Rogers visited a medical facility for his chest pain. Though doctors never officially diagnosed it, wrestling lore has long told the story of the "Nature Boy" suffering a heart attack after the *Ottawa Citizen* reported it as fact on April 23.

With Rogers' health deteriorating, it was becoming evident that the forty-two-year-old champion's time at the top was tapering off. With that, McMahon began a quest to find a challenger worthy enough to carry his new promotion through its earliest days. During the exhaustive search, he thought back to a young man he helped establish years earlier: Bruno Sammartino.

Buddy Rogers



"There was a guy out of Pittsburgh by the name of Rudy Miller," said Arnold Skaaland, prior to his passing in 2007. "He brought in this young kid who wanted to become a wrestler, Bruno Sammartino. He was the only guy to lift 500 pounds over his head; he was a bodybuilder who wanted to become a wrestler. So Vince Sr. asked me to take him to the gym and show him a few things. A few weeks later, Vince Sr. asked me to go on the road with him and be his manager."

Fast forward to May 17, 1963, and Sammartino found himself challenging the weakened Buddy Rogers for the WWE Championship in front of 19,639 fans at Madison Square Garden. A mere forty-eight seconds after the opening bell, Sammartino had claimed the title when Rogers submitted to the Italian backbreaker.

FACT:

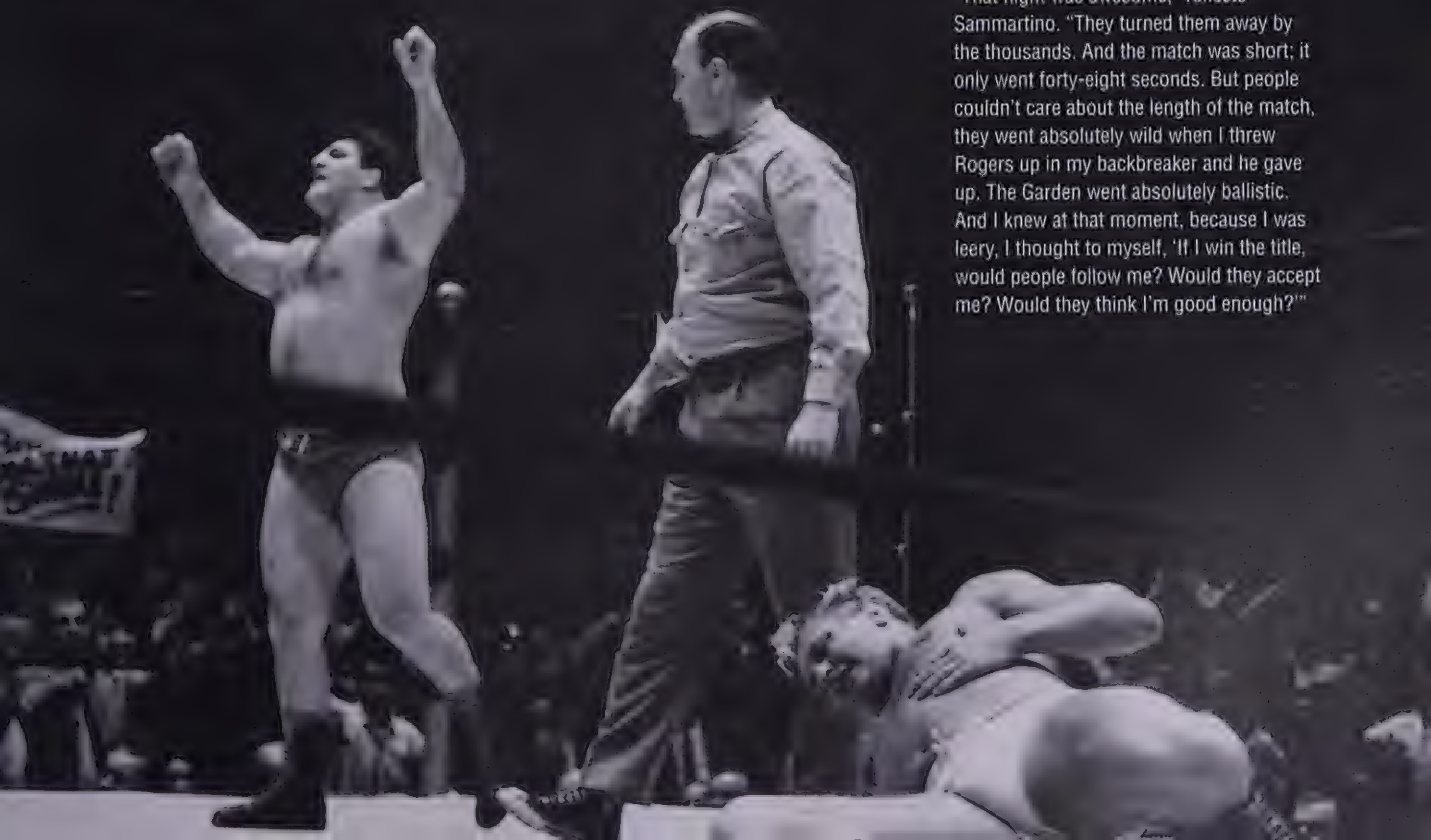
The May 17, 1963, card at MSG attracted 19,639 fans and grossed \$58,966.10, nearly three times the dollar figure brought in by Rogers versus Sammartino at Chicago's Amphitheatre in November 1961.

"Buddy had his run, and my dad wanted to go with Bruno, who was billed as the world's strongest man, and probably wasn't far from it at the time," recalls Vincent K. McMahon. "Bruno had extraordinary charisma and at the same time, ethnicity was important back in the day. There were a lot of Italians in New York and Philly. And I think that's another reason why my dad was inclined to bring Bruno in as the top guy. And Bruno had this confidence about him and this believability about him. So Bruno was my dad's choice and was for many, many years."



Bruno Sammartino

"That night was awesome," reflects Sammartino. "They turned them away by the thousands. And the match was short; it only went forty-eight seconds. But people couldn't care about the length of the match, they went absolutely wild when I threw Rogers up in my backbreaker and he gave up. The Garden went absolutely ballistic. And I knew at that moment, because I was leery, I thought to myself, 'If I win the title, would people follow me? Would they accept me? Would they think I'm good enough?'"



They did. Behind his great strength, charisma, and ability to connect to the territory's large Italian fan base, Sammartino became every bit the champion Rogers was expected to be, and then some. With Sammartino leading the way, WWE was able to navigate through a potentially devastating situation in Rogers' failing health to maintain its overwhelming and far-reaching popularity. Fans in Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Philadelphia, Boston, and the rest of the Northeastern seaboard regularly sold out their local arenas to catch a glimpse of Sammartino and the rest of WWE's larger-than-life competitors.

During his seven years, eight months, and one day as champion, Sammartino toppled the industry's biggest threats, sold out MSG more than sixty times, and even made a fan out of Pope Paul VI, who summoned the Italian strongman to the Vatican for a private visit. But the Pope wasn't Sammartino's only fan overseas. Demand for the WWE Champion became so great that Sammartino soon found himself traveling the globe to defend the gold. Tirelessly, he jumped from country to country representing the company, rarely stopping to realize just how immensely popular he had become.

FACT:

On September 27, 1965, Bruno Sammartino's WWE Championship was stolen from his car in New York City. Then-WWE president Willie Gilzenberg offered a \$10,000 reward and promised charges would not be pressed if the title was returned. It was never recovered.

★ GREATEST ATTRACTION ★

IN THE

HISTORY OF MADISON SQUARE GARDEN


FRED BLASSIE
JULY 11, 1964
SOLD OUT

★

KILLER KOWALSKI
AUGUST 23, 1963
SOLD OUT

★

THE GREAT MORTIER
JUNE 21, 1963
SOLD OUT



GORILLA MONSOON
JUNE 6, 1964
SOLD OUT

★

DR. JERRY GRAHAM
MARCH 16, 1964
SOLD OUT

★

BUDDY ROGERS
MAY 17, 1963
SOLD OUT

★ ★ ★ ★

BRUNO SAMMARTINO

★ ★ ★ ★

HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION

BRUNO SAMMARTINO

HAS ALSO SUCCESSFULLY DEFENDED HIS TITLE AGAINST MANY OTHER OUTSTANDING INTERNATIONAL WRESTLING STARS AND HAS DRAWN GATE RECEIPTS OF MORE THAN \$2,000,000 IN MADISON SQUARE GARDEN.

WALDO VON ERICH
OCT. 19, 1964
SOLD OUT

★

GENE KINISKY
NOV. 16, 1964
SOLD OUT

★

TARZAN TYLER
SEPT. 27, 1965
SOLD OUT

COWBOY BILL WATTS
OCT. 20, 1965
SOLD OUT

★

BIG BILL MILLER
AUGUST 2, 1965
SOLD OUT

★

GIANT BABA
FEB. 17, 1964
SOLD OUT

"I wasn't aware of what was going on worldwide," admits Sammartino. "When my first trip to Japan came about, I got off the plane and there must've been 150 to 200 news people there. Flashes were going off everywhere; it was blinding. I thought, 'Oh my gosh, who's on this plane? Who'd I miss?' Never in my wildest imaginations did I think I was responsible for all that."



With the fame came a considerable increase in income. A 1965 *Sports Illustrated* article listed Sammartino alongside Mickey Mantle as one of sports' highest-paid athletes at approximately \$125,000 per year. One year later, Sammartino was bringing in \$200,000. With his earnings, the champ purchased a \$6,000 Cadillac and a \$4,000 stereo, among other luxuries.

Sammartino wasn't the only one enjoying the successes of the new promotion's popularity; WWE as a whole also benefited greatly. In fact, demand for the product became so great that the company was able to charge elite prices as compared to other sports and entertainment productions. For example, tickets to WWE's 1969 card at Boston's Fenway Park featuring Sammartino versus Killer Kowalski went for as much as \$10 a piece. In comparison, a World Series ticket in the same venue went for just \$8 in 1967.

Recognizing WWE's popularity and importance to their success, MSG respectfully invited McMahon's promotion to be the arena's first-ever ring show when it re-opened in February 1968. In the main event, Sammartino fended off the challenge of 325-pound Apache Indian Bull Ramos. It was Sammartino's 55th Garden main event over the past five years.

Sammartino remained on top until 1971, when the rigors of being champion eventually caught up with him.

"It was time for me to take a break," recalls Sammartino. "I approached Vince McMahon, Sr. and told him, 'My body cannot do what it's supposed to do. And I don't want those people who paid money to come see me to be cheated because I can't give it what I used to be able to give it.'

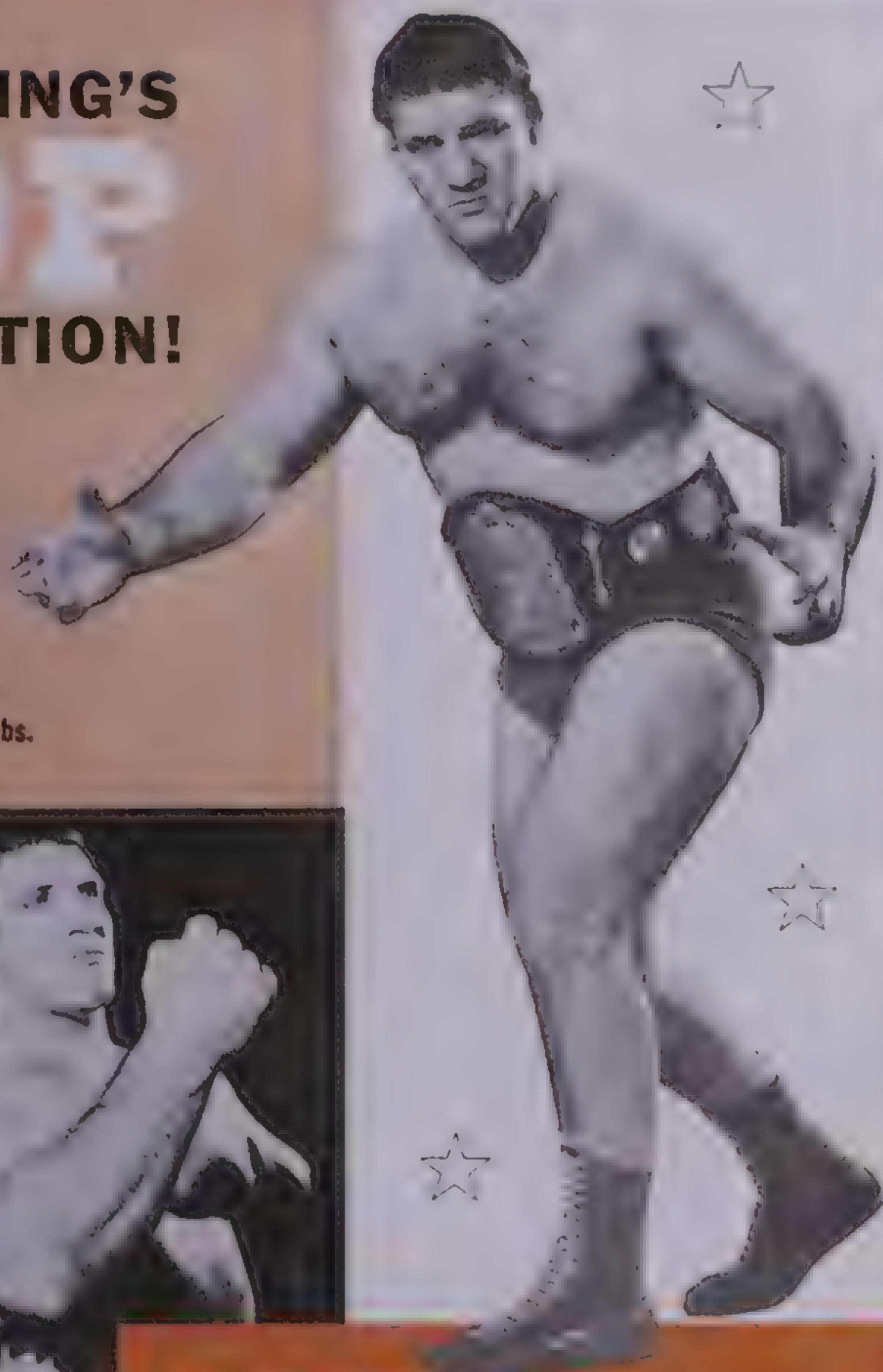
"So I told him he had to get somebody else ready. Whenever somebody gets the title, the last thing they want to do in the world is give it up. But after eight years, I wanted to give it up because my body demanded that I give it up so I could recuperate."

With the Cold War at its peak, a tired Sammartino defended his WWE Championship against feared Russian, Ivan Koloff, at MSG on January 18, 1971. With nearly eight straight years of success to Sammartino's credit, few in attendance expected Koloff to actually pull off the upset. But in front of a sold-out crowd, the Russian Bear achieved the unthinkable when he pinned Sammartino's shoulders to the mat following a kneedrop from the top rope.

"Arnold Skaaland helped me up after the match," remembers Sammartino. "And you could hear a pin drop in the Garden. And as I was walking to make my way to my dressing room, there were people actually sobbing saying, 'Bruno, we still love you, you're still the greatest ever.' It touched me so deeply. When I went in that dressing room, I had tears in my eyes. I felt guilty; I felt like I let them all down. I didn't understand that they had this kind of love for me."

WRESTLING'S TOP ATTRACTION!

Born: Abruzzi, Italy
Home: Pittsburgh, Pa.
Age 27; Weight: 265 lbs.



★
★
★
★
★
STRONGEST
MAN IN THE
WORLD!

**BRUNO
SAMMARTINO** WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT
WRESTLING CHAMPION



Ivan Koloff wins the WWE Championship after defeating Bruno Sammartino

The Garden did a lot for me as far as keeping my name throughout the world. And when you wrestled in the Garden like I did every month, they used to publish like ten wrestling magazines at the time, and I would be on the cover of about six or seven of them. Then those magazines would get distributed worldwide. I used to go to different countries and go to the newsstand and see all these magazines and I was on the cover of all of them. The Garden played a tremendous role in my career.



— Bruno Sammartino

CARDS OF THE 1960s

MATCHUPS

May 17, 1963

★ Madison Square Garden, New York, NY ★



Bruno
Sammartino

Defeated

Buddy
Rogers

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP



ALSO



- ★ The Magnificent Maurice defeated Karl Steif
- ★ Pat Barrett defeated Godo Chihuahua
- ★ Johnny Barend defeated Tim Woods
- ★ Pedro Morales defeated Willie Bath
- ★ The Great Mortimer defeated The Great Scott
- ★ The Fabulous Kangaroos defeated Pete Sanchez and Vittorio Apollo
- ★ Bobo Brazil and Dory Dixon vs. U.S. Tag Team Champions Skull Murphy and Brute Bernard ended in a curfew draw

November 26, 1964

★ Capitol Arena, Washington, DC ★

Thanksgiving!



Eddie & Jerry Graham

Defeated

Manuel Soto & Pedro Morales



ADDITIONAL LINEUP



- ★ Women's Champion The Fabulous Moolah defeated Toni Rose
- ★ Sam Steamboat defeated Humberto Mercado
- ★ Waldo Von Erich defeated Kenny Ackles
- ★ WWE Champion Bruno Sammartino and Bill Watts defeated Gene Kelly and Steve Stanlee



March 1, 1965

Civic Center, Baltimore, MD



MAIN EVENT

**WWE CHAMPION BRUNO SAMMARTINO
& WAHOO McDANIEL**

Defeated

THE GOLDEN TERROR & SMASHER SLOAN

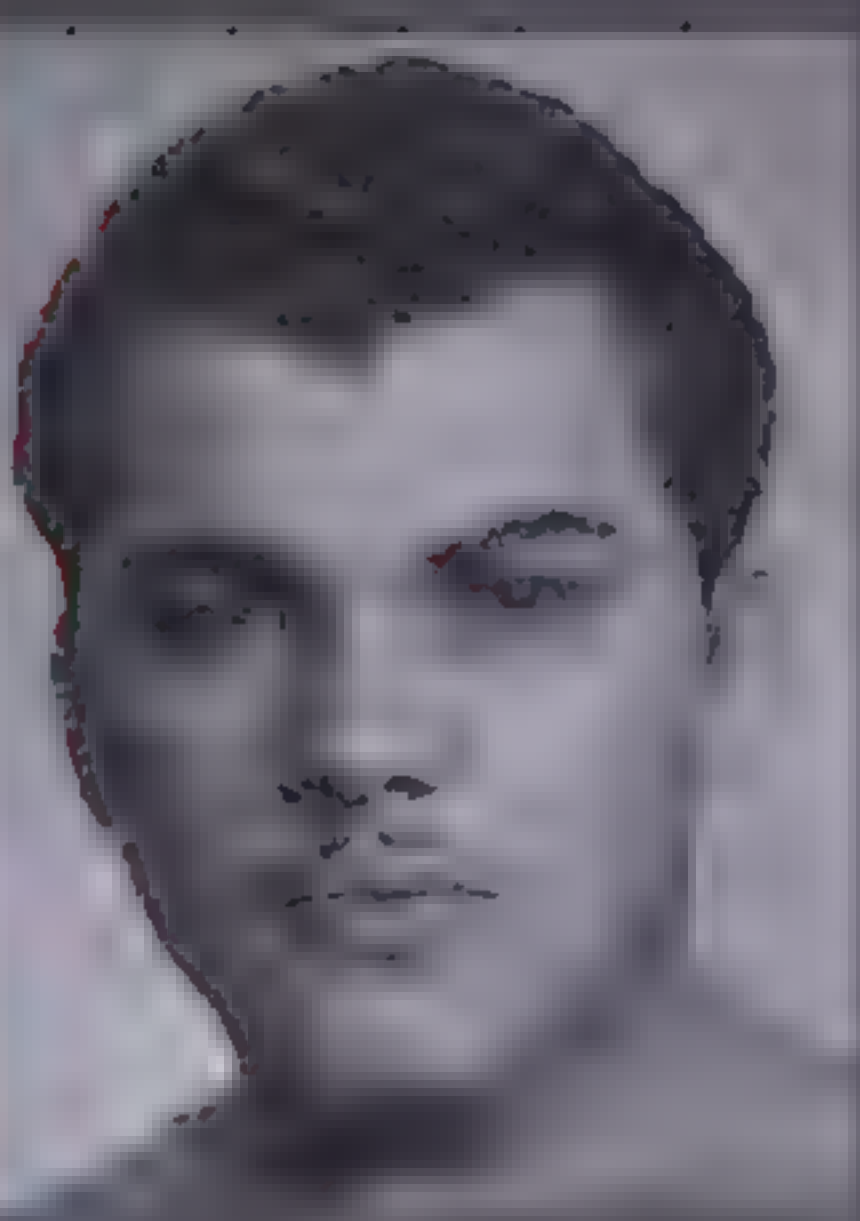
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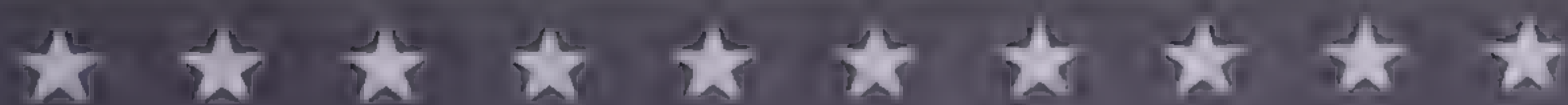
Jerry Graham

Defeated

Miguel Perez



- ★ Gene Kiniski defeated Kenny Ackles
- ★ Bobo Brazil vs. Waldo Von Erich ended in a draw
- ★ Don McClarty defeated Tony Newberry



ALSO ON MARCH 1, 1965

WWE Hall of Famer Booker T was born.

January 7, 1966

★ Island Garden Arena, West Hempstead, NY ★

King Curtis Iaukea

Defeated

**Arnold
Skaaland**



★

ALSO

★



Bobo Brazil

Defeated

Bill Miller



- ★ Miguel Perez defeated Angelo Savoldi
- ★ Johnny Valentine defeated Gene DuBuque
- ★ Baron Mikel Scicluna defeated Chief Big Heart
- ★ WWE Champion Bruno Sammartino defeated Tarzan Tyler

ALSO ON JANUARY 7, 1966

Gene Kiniski defeated Lou Thesz for the NWA Championship in St. Louis, MO.

SATURDAY BIG TIME WRESTLING

Civic Center, Baltimore, MD — September 23, 1967

EDOUARD CARPENTIER Def. **PROF. TORU TANAKA**



INCLUDING



Spiros Arion
VS.
Hans Mortier

Ended in a Draw



- ★ Sammy Rubin defeated Lou Albano
- ★ Bette Boucher and The Fabulous Moolah defeated Joyce Grable and Doris Ponds
- ★ Baron Mikel Scicluna defeated Smasher Sloan
- ★ Miguel Perez defeated Guillotine Gordon
- ★ WWE Champion Bruno Sammartino vs. Gorilla Monsoon ended in a no contest

ALSO ON SEPTEMBER 23, 1967

Legendary wrestler Stanislaus Zbyszko passed away at the age of 88.

August 17, 1968

★ Madison Square Garden, New York City, NY ★



TAG TEAM EVENT

**WWE CHAMPION BRUNO SAMMARTINO
& VICTOR RIVERA**

Defeated

GORILLA MONSOON & PROF. TORU TANAKA

WITH

- ★ Irish Jackie and the Jamaica Kid defeated Sky Low Low and Little Brutus
- ★ Arnold Skaaland defeated Frank Hickey
- ★ Argentina Apollo defeated Bull Ramos
- ★ Dick Steinborn vs. Earl Maynard ended in a draw
- ★ Bobo Brazil defeated Virgil the Kentucky Butcher



ALSO ON AUGUST 17, 1968

Dr. X defeated Verne Gagne for the AWA Championship in Bloomington, MN.

April 3, 1969

★ National Arena, Washington, DC ★

WRESTLING EVENT!

Rocky Johnson



Angelo Savoldi

★

ADDITIONAL LINEUP

★

- ★ Prof. Toru Tanaka defeated Pete Sanchez
- ★ John L. Sullivan defeated Duke Savage
- ★ Lou Albano and Tony Altimore defeated Arnold Skaaland and Carlos Colon
- ★ Haystacks Calhoun and WWE Champion Bruno Sammartino vs. Bulldog Brower and Killer Kowalski ended in a draw

ALSO ON APRIL 3, 1969

Former WWE Superstar Lance Storm was born.

THE 1970s

CONTINUING EVOLUTION

Ivan Koloff's terrifying reign only lasted a few weeks before giving way to Pedro Morales, a popular Puerto Rican Superstar who became a hero to the large Latino population in the New York City area. When Morales pinned Koloff to capture the WWE Championship, the sizable subset of Latino fans were given a welcome escape from their everyday worries.

"Pedro Morales was a great talent who knew how to use his ethnicity and satisfy his people," said Ernie Ladd, prior to passing in 2007. "He knew how to make all of his people love him and pay to come see him. He was a great talent, a fighter, and a warrior."



Morales spent the better part of the next three years fending off the likes of Ladd and George "The Animal" Steele. While the popular champion was achieving great success in the ring, behind the scenes a young Vincent Kennedy McMahon was taking his first steps toward establishing himself as sports-entertainment's most influential figure. But not without conflict.



Pedro Morales

*Vincent K. McMahon*

Around the same time, the fledgling promoter also found himself in front of the camera, thanks to commentator Ray Morgan's shoddy negotiating skills. When Morgan tried to hold up Vincent J. McMahon for more money moments before a show, McMahon simply kicked Morgan out of his office and anointed his son, Vincent K. McMahon, as the new commentator.

The news caught the younger McMahon off guard, and he immediately began to question his father's decision. To help calm his nerves,

Vincent J. promised to give his son another commentator with which to work.

"Scared to death, I went out and did the best I could," says McMahon. "The person he gave me to work with was a gentleman that went by the name of Arnold Skaaland. He was a great guy, but the problem with Arnold was that I would set him up and ask him a question and he would simply say, 'Yup.' Or I'd set up another question and he would go, 'Nope.' So Arnold wasn't a lot of help to me in those days. I think Arnold lasted like three or four weeks, then I said, 'Pop, please you got to give me somebody else. I'm dying out there; I'm working by myself.' So he gave me someone else and one of those individuals he gave me down the line was Antonino Rocca. Rocca was difficult to understand. He had a really thick accent and was not terribly bright in terms of that job. And then he gave me Pat Patterson, a French Canadian.

*Arnold Skaaland**Pat Patterson interviews Andre the Giant*

"I begged my dad to be in the business, but he did not want me to be in it. He wanted me to be an accountant or an attorney," recalls McMahon. "He wanted me to have a 'legitimate' job with a pension. Back in those days, there was no security. The promotion business was a very volatile business. And actually the word 'promoter' back in those days was not a good word. If you were a promoter, people would run from you. Promoters were thought of as conmen and things of that nature. So my dad wanted something better for me, which in hindsight, I appreciate. But all I ever wanted was to be in this business. I just loved it."

After much convincing, the elder McMahon eventually acquiesced and allowed his son to promote matches in Bangor, Maine, the northernmost tip of his territory. With a population in the low five figures, Bangor was a far cry from the megapolis of New York City, but the hungry young McMahon saw it as his opportunity to prove he could be a success behind the scenes.

"But it was a blast. It was really learning on the job. I'd learn so much by doing commentary, and by doing the interviews as well. And I learned about what makes the business tick, the personalities, the storylines, and things of that nature."

BRUNO'S BACK

Pedro Morales' near three-year reign as WWE Champion came to a halt when the reviled Stan Stasiak upended the Puerto Rican icon in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in December 1973. Over the course of the past decade, fans only knew of their favorites representing the promotion as champion, sans a combined forty-three days that Buddy Rogers and Ivan Koloff held the title. So the idea of Stasiak parading around with the gold certainly seemed foreign. Luckily for fans, there was an end in sight, as Bruno Sammartino was preparing for another run on top.

"I started feeling really good again and I started working out again. And then I started wrestling at my own pace and I fell in love with wrestling all over again," admits Sammartino. "Then Vince McMahon Sr. came calling and said, 'Bruno, we've got to have you back.'"



Stan Stasiak defeats Pedro Morales to become WWE Champion

A mere nine days after Stasiak won the title, Sammartino was indeed back in the main event, defeating the new WWE Champion for the gold at Madison Square Garden. The win made Sammartino the first-ever two-time champion and reignited the public's love affair with WWE. It wasn't long before television stations up and down the east coast wanted a piece of WWE. And with Sammartino on top, more than twenty-five cities had access to the promotion's two weekly programs. But with such attention came careful consideration for the company's longtime golden goose: ticket sales.

"We learned our lesson from boxing and pro football," Vincent J. McMahon told *Film Comment* magazine in 1976. "And we present no feature bouts on TV for free."

Unlike today, the television product of the 1970s was used almost solely to attract audiences to the arenas. Over the course of Sammartino's second reign, WWE's programs attracted record crowds to arenas up and down the east coast, most notably Madison Square Garden, which the champ headlined more than two hundred times over the course of his time on top.

"Sammartino's popularity was bigger than anyone else's," says Larry Zbyszko. "It was really an amazing thing at the time. And Bruno broke down all those ethnic barriers that existed back then. Bruno was loved. He was loved if you were Italian, if you were Polish, if you were black, if you were Puerto Rican; you loved Bruno. He had the humility, and he had the most awesome look you ever saw. He triumphed over evil. And the bottom line was people loved him."

Despite all the love, Sammartino's time on top again began to take its toll on his body. When he defeated Stasiak for the title in 1973, he only planned to compete for another year. Fast forward to 1977 and he was still on top.

"On the fourth year, I broke my neck in Madison Square Garden," recalls Sammartino. "I came from within a millimeter from being paralyzed from the neck down. So when I recouped from that, which I was very lucky, that's when I told Vince, 'One year has gone to four. I got to get out.'"



Bruno would come back for one last run in the mid-1980s



A SUPERSTAR IS BORN

April 30, 1977, was a bittersweet day for Bruno Sammartino. After a combined 4,040 days as WWE Champion, the iconic competitor finally “got out” after losing the gold to Superstar Billy Graham in Baltimore, Maryland.

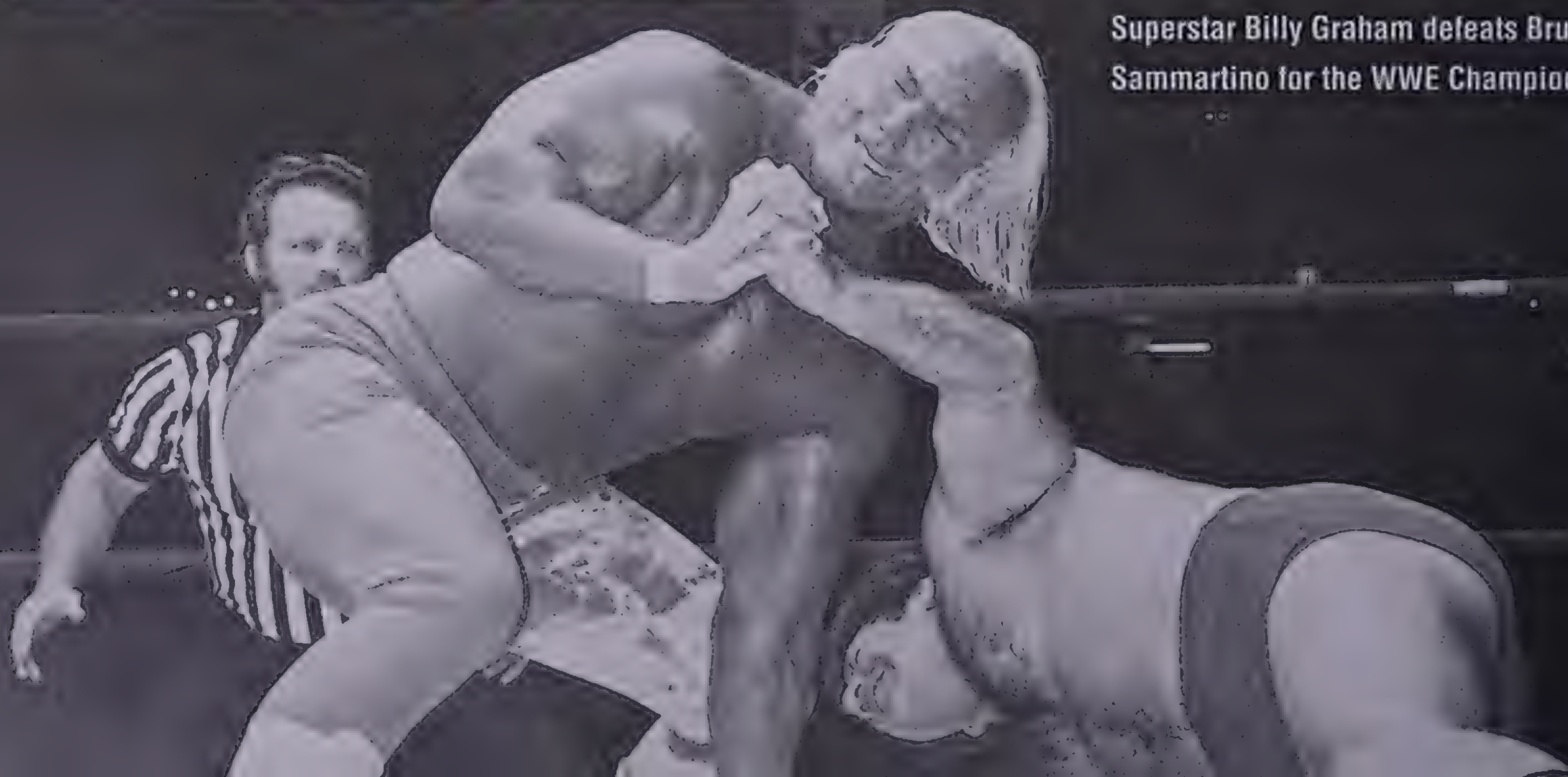
Graham was unlike any champion fans had ever witnessed before. With his bleached-blond hair, tie-dyed tights, and chiseled frame that appeared as if it were carved from granite, Graham exuded a sense of showmanship that was foreign to Bruno Sammartino and Pedro Morales. In the beginning, most fans didn’t know how to react to the new titlist. Most jeered him, mainly because he dethroned Sammartino, but as time passed in Graham’s title reign, he began to attract new fans, many of which hung on his every word.



“I’m the man of the hour. The one with the power, too sweet to be sour,” he’d often say in his signature charismatic style, which he admittedly borrowed from Muhammad Ali.



Superstar Billy Graham defeats Bruno Sammartino for the WWE Championship



With Superstar on top, WWE began setting attendance records at the Boston Garden and Philadelphia Spectrum. He even sold out Madison Square Garden in nineteen of his twenty main events as champion.

After a successful ten months with Graham on top, Vincent J. McMahon stunned Superstar when he informed him that the title would be going to upstart Bob Backlund, a competitor who shared similar values with past successful champions, Sammartino and Morales. The decision infuriated Graham, who saw Backlund as far too boring to be the main attraction.

A SIGN OF PROTEST:

Displeased with having to defend against Bob Backlund, Superstar Billy Graham shelved his traditional glitzy ring gear in favor of all-white tights when the two Superstars battled on February 20, 1978.

"My title reign came to an end way too short," claims Graham. "I had an incredible year as a champion and my momentum was picking up and picking up. Before I was beaten by Bob Backlund for the title, I was in a Cage Match with Putski in Pittsburgh on Friday night. Saturday night in Philly, I had a Cage Match versus Sammartino. It was totally sold out and the local news at 5 o'clock said outside of the building there were 10,000 people trying to get in."



Bob Backlund held the WWE title for an amazing 2,135 days

THE BOY NEXT DOOR



Unlike the flamboyant Superstar Billy Graham, who had an unquenchable thirst for attention, Bob Backlund was considerably more reserved. He didn't talk trash or break out into rhyme like his predecessor. Instead, he simply let his in-ring work, which was anchored by a strong amateur style, do all his talking.

At first, audiences responded to the soft-spoken champion and his boy-next-door good looks with a lukewarm response. But once they began to appreciate his skills, he became in high demand the world over, something which caught Backlund off guard.

"Winning the championship from Superstar Billy Graham changed my whole life. Instantly everybody knew me all over the country, all over the world actually," says Backlund. "I'd been to Japan a few times prior to that, but when I went over there as WWE Champion, it was a lot different. I got treated differently. I had people in the airports recognize me. When I would drive down streets in Glastonbury, Connecticut, people would recognize me. It was a completely different world.

"It was a pleasure to get the WWE Championship, but it changed my life in a lot of ways. That saying, 'It's lonely at the top' is actually reality. When you get there, you kind of go about things your own way. You don't make a lot of friends. You just have to focus on being the WWE Champion."

And that's exactly what Backlund did for nearly six years, which is still recognized as the second-longest WWE Championship reign in history.

INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP

With a list of former champions that includes the names Greg Valentine, Ricky Steamboat, Mr. Perfect, Bret Hart, and Chris Jericho, it's no wonder the Intercontinental Championship is held in such high regard today. For more than thirty years, the title has been proudly held by sports-entertainment's most athletic and gifted athletes. Along the way, these Superstars battled in some of WWE's most exciting matches, helping solidify the title as one of the most prestigious of all time.

Given its strong standing today, it's almost difficult to believe that the Intercontinental Championship was actually spawned from a now defunct title with almost no historical prestige: the North American Heavyweight Championship.

"When Vince Sr. decided to bring me in, he told me that the first time I'd be introduced to people would be as the North American Heavyweight Champion," recalls Ted DiBiase, who was recognized as the first-ever North American Heavyweight Champion upon entering WWE in February 1979. "Up until that time, the only titles the WWE had were the WWE Championship, World Tag Team Championship, and the Women's Championship. So it was the first time that any other championship was introduced to the company, and I happened to be the guy."

DiBiase defended the title until June 1979, when he was defeated by Pat Patterson in Allentown, Pennsylvania. According to DiBiase, WWE had planned on keeping the North American Heavyweight Championship through Patterson's reign and beyond. But that all changed when DiBiase revealed a potentially confusing anecdote.

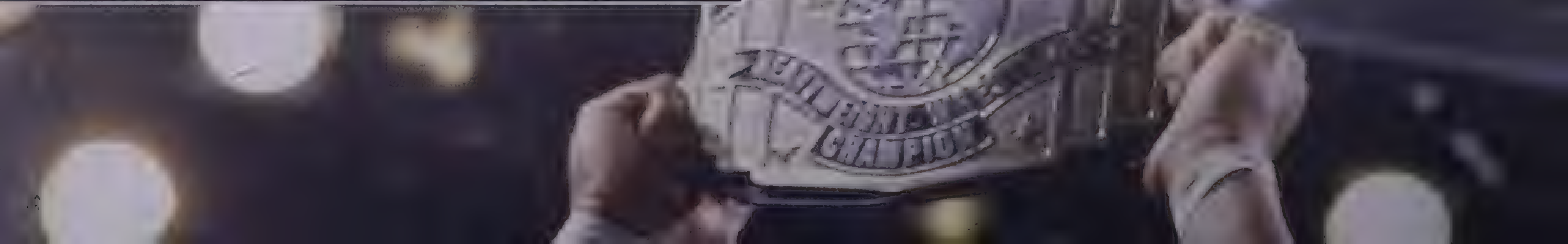
"I just happened to mention to Vince Sr. that I worked for Bill Watts in Mid South and that their championship was also called the North American Heavyweight Championship," claims DiBiase. "Not wanting to step on anybody's toes, they quickly created a situation where Patterson had entered and won an international tournament in Rio de Janeiro where everybody in the tournament put up their titles and whoever came out the winner would be crowned the Intercontinental Champion. And that's the way they changed the name of that title." In reality, the tournament never actually happened. The fictitious event was strategically created as a vehicle to give instant credibility to the renamed championship. Rio de Janeiro was chosen in part because it was far enough away from the northeast United States that fans in 1979 couldn't accurately research its validity.

In those days, Vince Jr. was doing the interviews. And he would have so much fun asking me where I won the title, because he knew I had a hard time pronouncing Rio de Janeiro. He'd keep asking me, and I'd keep messing it up. Everybody laughed.

—Pat Patterson



Pat Patterson with the Intercontinental Championship



*Greg Valentine**Don Muraco**Ricky Steamboat*

CAPE COD COLISEUM

As the 1970s began to wind down, Vincent K. McMahon, who was still promoting and serving as an on-air commentator for his father, purchased the Cape Cod Coliseum. Normally a summertime venue that relied heavily on the popular peninsula's influx of vacationers, the 7,200-seat Coliseum transformed into a year-round attraction under McMahon's ownership. Van Halen, Rush, the Harlem Globetrotters, the Boston Bruins, and many other attractions all sold out the Coliseum during what were traditionally considered off months. The venue was even home to the professional Atlantic Coast Hockey League's Cape Cod Buccaneers, who were also owned by McMahon.

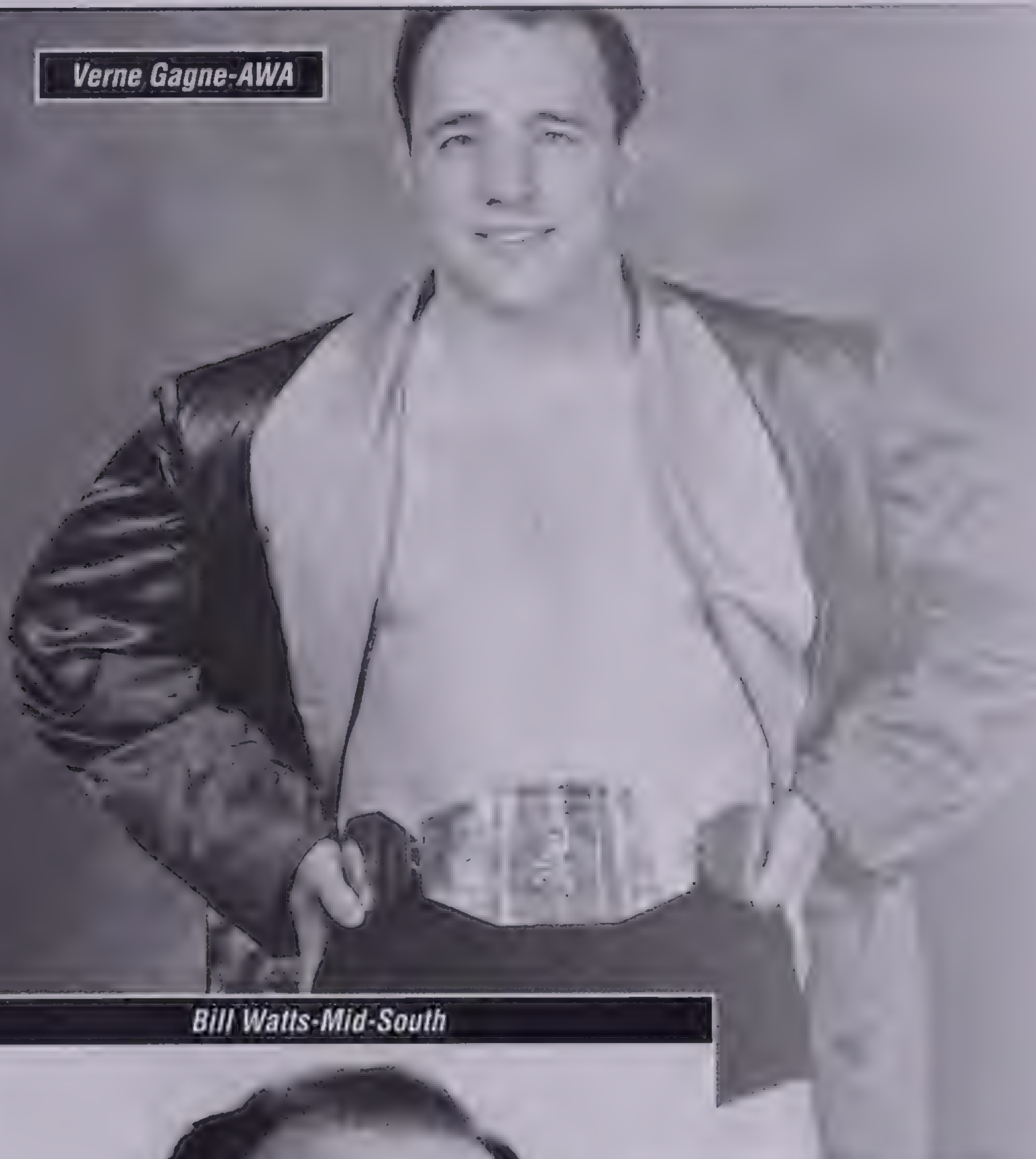
For year-round residents of Cape Cod, the Coliseum's new business model was a welcome change, as entertainment options were limited during the colder months. More importantly for the McMahons, however, it gave them a hands-on education in what they could expect as they became more influential in the sports-entertainment industry in the early 1980s.

"We really found out how an arena works," recalls Linda McMahon, who had been by Vince's side since before the couple's 1966 wedding. "I negotiated the contract with Ticketmaster and learned their business soup to nuts. We joined the IAAM (International Association of Auditorium Managers) and attended conferences all over the country, which helped us understand the difficulties that arena managers had. We also made connections with all of these arena managers all over the country, so that as WWE started to grow and expand years later, we knew a lot of the people. We knew what some of the issues were in the building; we knew what kind of ticket deals they had and all that. Owning the Cape Cod Coliseum was a great benefit."

TERRITORIES

Prior to the meteoric rise of WWE, North America was home to many different regional promotions, each with their own Superstars, Championships, and fans.

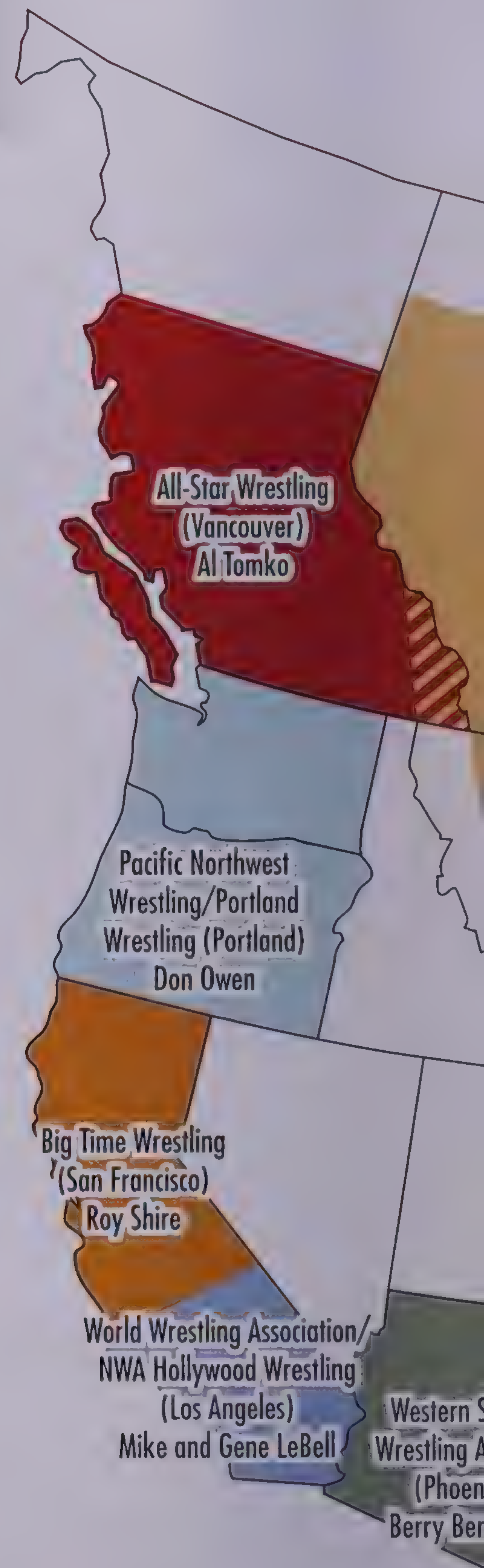
Verne Gagne-AWA



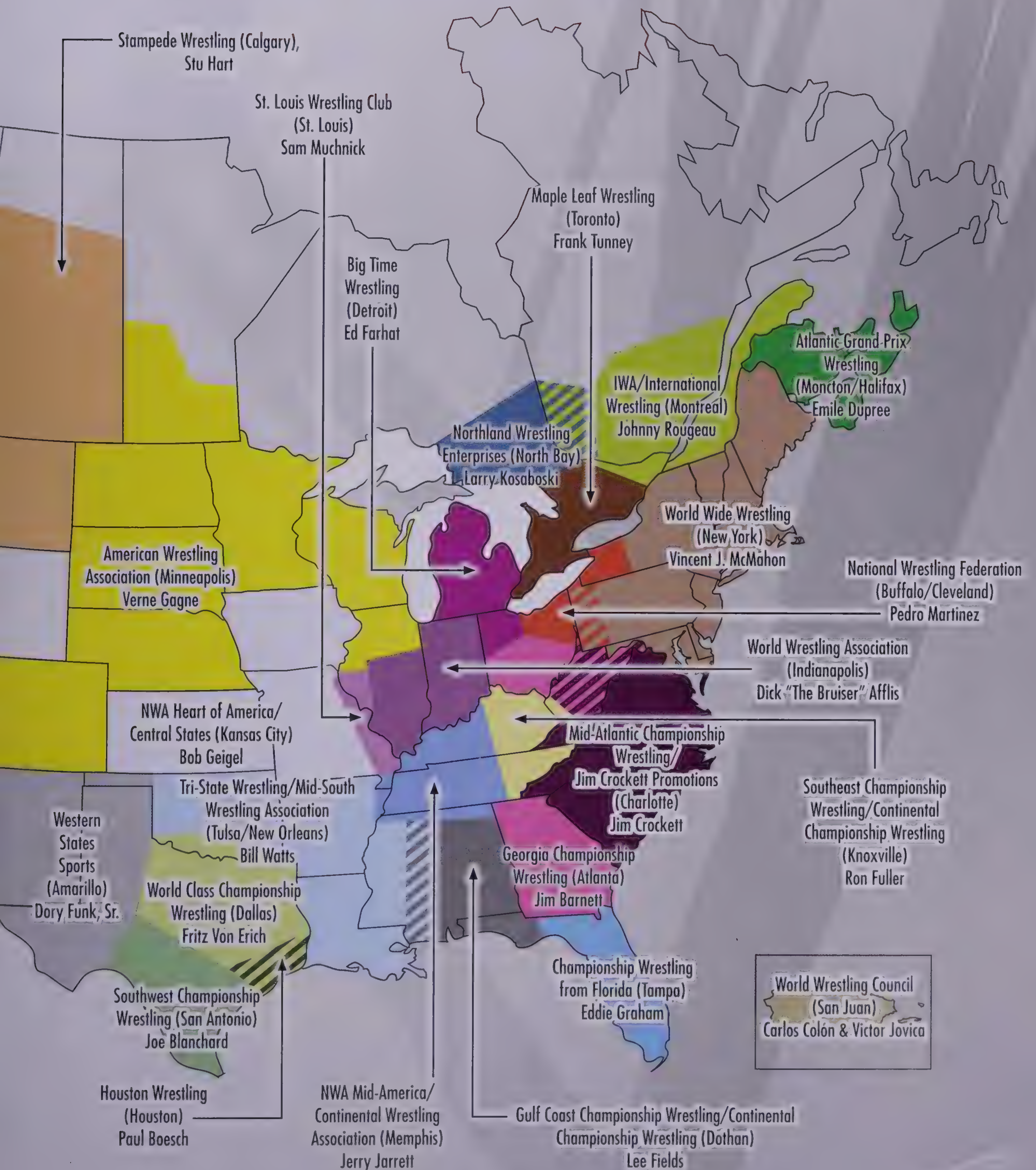
Bill Watts-Mid-South



Stu Hart-Stampede Wrestling



50th State Big Time Wrestling/
Polynesian Pacific Wrestling (Honolulu)
Ed Francis



NATIONAL EXPANSION

A NEW BUSINESS MODEL

Following “Toots” Mondts’ 1969 retirement, Vincent J. McMahon welcomed new partners Arnold Skaaland, Phil Zacko, and Gorilla Monsoon into the promotion. Together, the trio held fifty percent ownership of WWE, with McMahon controlling the remaining fifty percent. The partnership worked flawlessly through the 1970s; but as the new decade began to unfold, leadership within the company became uncertain when McMahon announced his desire to sell his shares.

“I can’t really let Pop sell this to somebody else,” Vincent K. McMahon told his wife, Linda, upon learning of his father’s plan to sell.

For Vincent J., selling to his son never even entered his mind. In fact, when finally approached by Vincent K. about taking over, the elder McMahon told his son that he didn’t know enough about the business and that it just wasn’t possible. But the younger McMahon, still in his mid-thirties, refused to take no for an answer and continued to work toward proving he was the right man for the job.

It wasn’t until 1981 that Vincent J. *and* his partners finally decided to sell to Titan Sports, which was the name of the promotion’s business Vince and Linda incorporated in February 1980. Most involved saw the sale as a welcome passing of the torch. One partner, however, was less than thrilled with the transfer of power.



Gorilla Monsoon



Vincent J. McMahon

“Monsoon pushed back at first because he was the heir apparent,” recalls Linda. “He was the one that Vincent said he was going to sell to because he understood the business, he was in the business, and he was a smart guy. So there was some pushback from him.”

Monsoon’s feelings aside, the husband and wife team moved forward with their pursuit of the company. In order to complete the sale, Vince and Linda were required to make four quarterly payments. If any payment was missed, the stock reverted back to the original partners, as well as the money that was already paid to them.

“I think they were convinced that we couldn’t do it,” says Linda. “They probably said to themselves, ‘Give the kid a try; he’ll find out it isn’t easy and if he doesn’t make it, it will come back to us *and* we will have gotten the payments along the way anyway.’”

But they did do it; and in June 1982, Vince and Linda McMahon finally closed the deal and became the owners of WWE. While history would later reveal the purchase to be quite profitable, at the time, they were simply buying nothing more than an opportunity. The company had very little money, and next to no physical assets. No computers. No employees. No desks. No office. In fact, Vince and Linda shared a single desk in their basement prior to eventually upgrading to a tiny office at the Cape Cod Coliseum. It was in this tiny office that Vince's vision of becoming a national powerhouse began to take shape.

"I recognized that my dad had a territory. And that was great, but I didn't want just a territory. I wanted all of it," says Vince. "When I bought the business, I knew what I really wanted to do with it: the projections of new personalities, the exploitation of the personalities we already had, and bringing in all the new talent from all over the country. So we began to compete with the other established promoters. My dad was very concerned when I did that because A) he thought I would not make it successful, and B) he thought I was going to wind up at the bottom of a river, which I was told many, many times would happen."

Arnold Skaaland



Wanting it all required McMahon to shatter professional wrestling's longstanding unwritten rule that a promoter must not transect into another's territory. Past transgressions resulted in the guilty promoter being blackballed from wrestling completely. So in an attempt to keep his national expansion as civil as possible, McMahon used the revenue his company was generating in ticket sales in the northeast to offer buyouts to territories across the country. Most promoters turned him down, some even laughed in his face. But McMahon wasn't offended; he simply turned around, went back to the office, and set in motion the next phase of his plan: syndicated television.

After striking deals with various territories proved fruitless, McMahon called each local television station and offered them more money to air WWE instead. Almost every station jumped at the opportunity. On the rare occasion the deal was refused, McMahon took his product to a competing station within the same market. By the end of McMahon's first year at the helm, WWE was broadcast on 70 stations across the country. Just a few short years later, WWE had expanded to 250 broadcast stations and reached 95 percent of households in the United States, making it the largest syndication network in all of television.

Vince and Linda McMahon



SYNDICATED TELEVISION

Joseph Perkins, who started working for Vincent J. McMahon out of college, handled much of WWE's national syndication efforts. He is currently a member of WWE's Board of Directors.

Along the way, WWE also began offering higher paydays to each territory's top stars. Not only did this solidify WWE's roster as the foremost in all of wrestling, but it also gave new viewers a sense of comfort when turning on McMahon's product. When fans in the Minnesota area switched to WWE on their televisions, they already had a vested interest in Superstars like The Iron Sheik and Adrian Adonis. The same held true for fans all across the country, including the Carolinas (Greg Valentine, Ricky Steamboat), Florida (Barry Windham, Mike Rotundo), and Texas (Dick Murdoch, Paul Orndorff).

Adrian Adonis



Ricky Steamboat

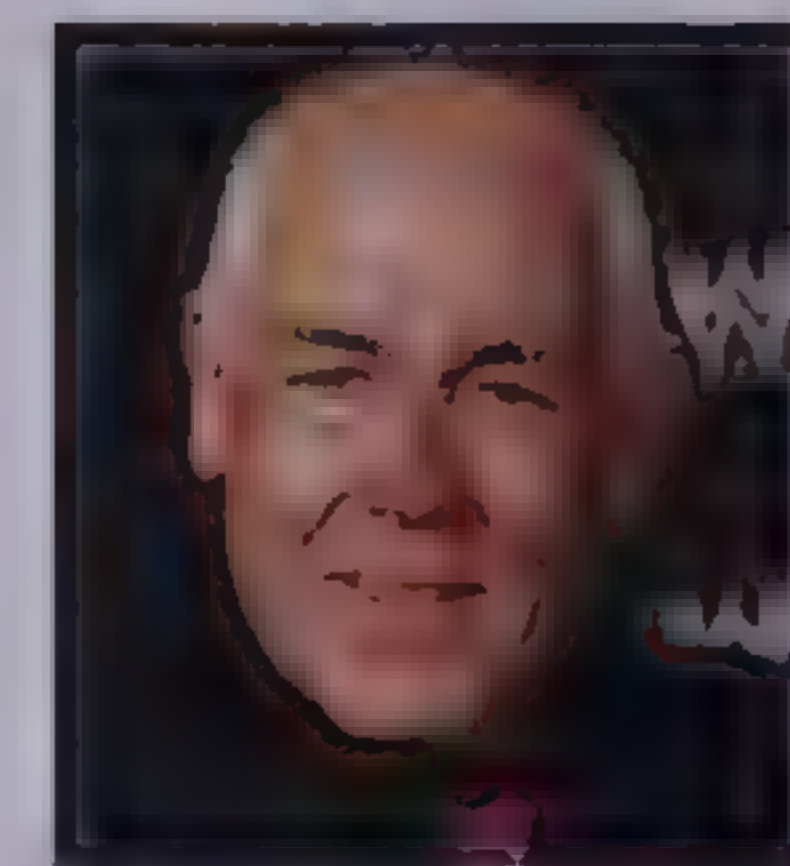


Dick Murdoch



If we would've been smarter, or better businessmen, people today might be saying, 'Go to Tully's office.' instead of Vince's office.

— Tully Blanchard, son of Joe Blanchard



With similar success on his mind, Texas promoter Joe Blanchard secured his own national television deal with the USA Network in December 1982. Broadcast from a poorly-lit grocery store that only held a few hundred fans, Blanchard's Southwest Championship Wrestling was unable to generate the revenue needed to maintain its prestigious USA positioning. As a result, McMahon was able to wrest the USA timeslot away from Blanchard less than one year into SCW's run. In SCW's place, WWE produced *All-American Wrestling*, and soon after expanded its USA offering to *Tuesday Night Titans*, a talk show that gave fans a glimpse of their favorite competitors outside the arena. Hosted by Vince McMahon and his sidekick Lord Alfred Hayes, the unpredictability of WWE Superstars interacting in a *Tonight Show*-esque atmosphere helped the show become the network's highest-rated primetime program after just five months. By March 1985, *TNT* was the nation's number one show on all of cable television.

Lou Albano on Tuesday Night Titans



The Hart Foundation in a dating skit from Tuesday Night Titans

ENTERING ENEMY TERRITORY

Despite having a nationwide presence on television, WWE still faced several roadblocks in presenting its live events in arenas across the country. Oftentimes local promoters had 30-day exclusivities written into their arena contracts, meaning no other wrestling promotion could hold an event in that arena 30 days before or after the local promotion's event. The promotion would then reserve the venue for six dates throughout the year, ensuring WWE couldn't book that same arena. To combat this, WWE elected to hold their events in venues atypical to the wrestling industry at the time.

"We went to the NBA arenas," recalls Senior Advisor and Board member Basil DeVito. "Typically, promoters at that time would go to the armory or secondary arenas. We went to the quality new arenas downtown that charged more. It was a costly investment, but it fit with our brand strategy to be top of the line, top quality, big time entertainment."

Securing dates at premier arenas proved to be a major step forward for WWE, but didn't solve all of the issues facing the expanding promotion. Once WWE showed up in a new city, they were typically tormented by the local athletic commission, which usually had strong ties to the area's already-established local promoters. It wasn't uncommon for the commission to fine Superstars exorbitant amounts of money for supposedly being late for a show. Some commissions even threatened to shut down shows altogether if a doctor (which they were responsible for providing) didn't show up. Eventually, WWE's popularity became too much for each commission to combat. And it wasn't long before members of athletic commissions started showing up backstage with their children and friends seeking autographs.

With the arenas and athletic commissions finally playing along, WWE began to alter its syndicated television model to ensure its product was marketed to as many fans as possible. In the beginning, the promotion would pay approximately \$200 per week to be on a television station. That deal was later replaced with an agreement that stated WWE would pay each television station five percent of net receipts of each live event in its area. This prompted stations to promote upcoming WWE cards as much as they could, resulting in increased exposure for WWE and continuous sellouts in 20,000 seat arenas all over the country. At that same time, many local promoters McMahon offered deals to just a few years prior were struggling to put 1,000 fans into armories.

Barry Windham



Greg Valentine



Paul Orndorff



"We had a better product," explains Vince. "And I kept pouring money back into our product, while the old time promoters were, 'gimme, gimme, gimme.' They didn't have a strong work ethic and I began to compete with them on a successful basis. It was all cash flow and brass balls and strong work ethic and without a doubt, a lot of luck."

MERCHANDISING'S INFANCY

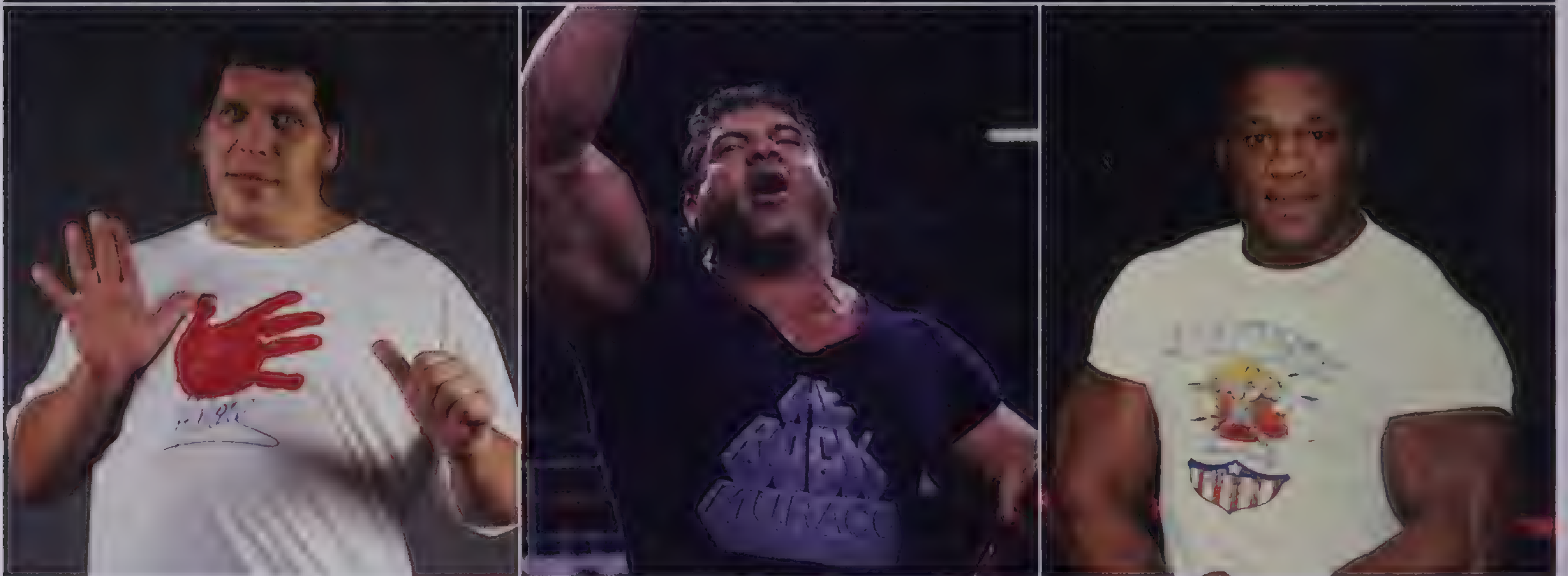
Surprisingly, WWE's meteoric rise in popularity didn't immediately equate to a rise in profits during the early days of national expansion. Yes, the company was bringing in more money than it ever had in the past, but nearly every dollar made from one territory went into establishing the next (purchasing television timeslots, travel, talent, marketing, etc.).

Those were the days when I had to look carefully at some of the costs we were incurring in the office. I remember we leased a typewriter for \$12 a month. I had to assess if we were better off buying the typewriter. I eventually said, 'No, we need those extra few dollars each month to invest in the next town.'

— Linda McMahon



Andre the Giant, Don Muraco, and Tony Atlas display examples of early merchandising



Eventually, WWE began to look for additional sources of revenue. They began selling souvenir programs at each live event. Once that business picked up, they invested in the sale of 8x10 photos of its Superstars. Next, Vince and Linda reflected on their days of promoting concerts at the Cape Cod Coliseum. Each show always included a makeshift kiosk that sold the bands' T-shirts. With that in mind, the next logical step was to sell T-shirts and hats with the Superstars' likenesses on them.

"I remember folding those T-shirts, putting them in boxes and loading them onto a Ryder truck and sending them to different arenas," says Linda. "Then kids would come up to us at arenas and say, 'I don't have any money. Is there some place I can write and order one?' So we started putting an order blank on the souvenir program. Pretty soon we had a robust mail order business."



McMAHON VS. TURNER, ROUND 1

WWE increased its already prominent national exposure when it purchased Georgia Championship Wrestling in the summer of 1984. With the sale came the coveted Saturday at 6:05 p.m. timeslot on Ted Turner's national cable network WTBS. Upon learning of the deal, Turner invited Vince and Linda to Atlanta for the weekend where they took in a Braves game and discussed WWE's new acquisition. At first, Turner's interest in WWE seemed friendly. But it wasn't long before his true intentions were revealed.

"Ted wanted to become our partner," says Linda. "We said, 'No.' Vince didn't want a partner, and that really torqued Ted off to no end."

Furious over his failure to gain a stake of WWE, Turner threatened to kick WWE off his airwaves. In turn, WWE took legal action against WTBS, claiming that eliminating WWE programming would be a breach of contract. Eventually, the two parties settled on the courthouse steps, literally. But despite the settlement, it was clear that McMahon and Turner could not work together. So Vince ripped up his contract in front of Ted and told him he didn't want to be in business with somebody who didn't want to be in business with him.

McMahon later sold his interest in Georgia Championship Wrestling to Jim Crockett Promotions, thus temporarily severing all ties to Turner. The two rivals would later square off again when Turner purchased Jim Crockett Promotions and renamed it World Championship Wrestling.



NATIONAL DOMINANCE

By mid decade, WWE had established itself as a national powerhouse. In doing so, many longtime promoters soon found themselves and their territories teetering on the brink of extinction, including Jerry Jarrett (Memphis), Fritz Von Erich (Dallas), Bill Watts (Mid-South), Bob Geigel (Central States), and many others.

Jerry Jarrett



"I came along and wanted to do something bigger with the business," says Vince. "I thought the formula that my dad had established in the northeast, which was 'our territory,' would work on a national basis and an international basis. So I began to compete.

"I don't have much sympathy for those individuals who 'lost their jobs.' What we're talking about are people who managed and owned these territories that were protected. It wasn't the real world; it certainly wasn't a very capitalistic society. And when I came along, those who knew how to compete, competed very favorably with me. Those who didn't, fell by the wayside."



Fritz Von Erich

HULKAMANIA

HULK HOGAN

Height: 6'7"

Weight: 302 lbs.

From: Venice Beach, California

Signature Move: Leg Drop

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

WWE Champion (6 times)

*WWE World Tag Team Champion
(1 time with Edge)*

WCW Champion (6 times)

*Royal Rumble Match winner
(2 times, 1990, 1991)*

WWE Hall of Fame (class of 2005)

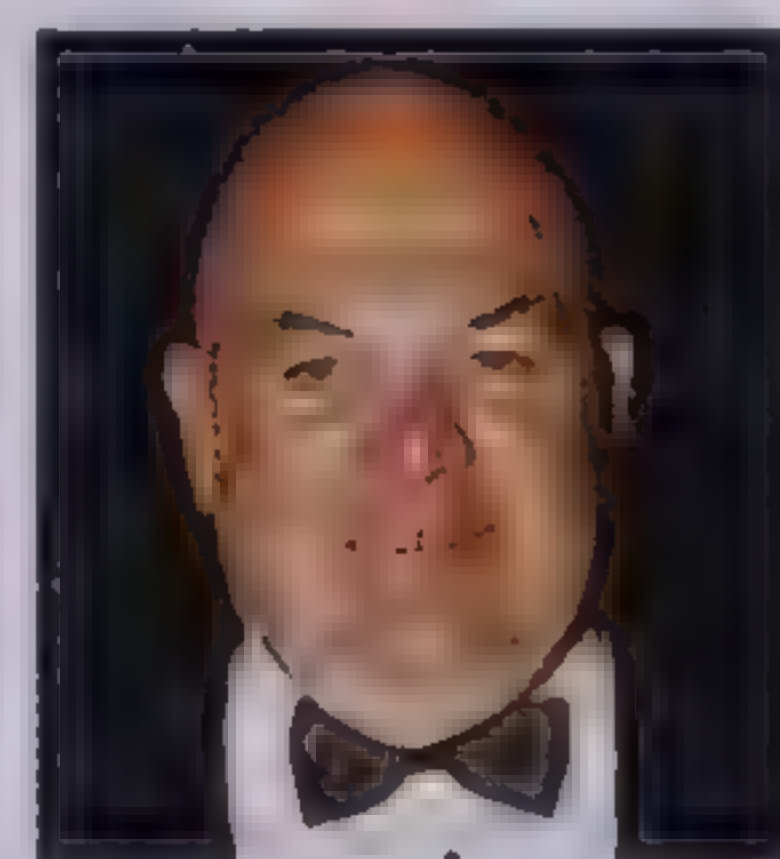


When Hulk Hogan dropped wrestling's most famous leg over The Iron Sheik on January 23, 1984, not only did he claim his first WWE Championship, but he also kicked off a national phenomenon known as Hulkamania. Soon, arenas across the country were overcome by red and yellow clad Hulkamaniacs, and fans of all ages began adhering to Hogan's three "demandments:" training, saying their prayers, and eating their vitamins.

Behind the strength of his 24-inch pythons, Hogan tore through a long list of WWE's baddest Superstars, including "Rowdy" Roddy Piper, Andre the Giant, and Randy "Macho Man" Savage. Outside the ring, Hulkamania's undeniable popularity commanded the attention of nearly every mainstream media outlet. The charismatic WWE Champion quickly found himself on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*, hosting *Saturday Night Live*, and starring in movies. He even had his own Saturday morning cartoon.

RECALLING HULKAMANIA

"You'll hear a lot of things about Hogan, and a lot of it is jealousy. He was getting a push that was unreal. He was also charismatic enough to carry the load. Not one of the best workers in the business, but very charismatic and very talented...He was the hottest piece of entertainment, thanks to Vince McMahon, in the country and in the world. There was nothing hotter than Hulk Hogan for about a three-year run there."

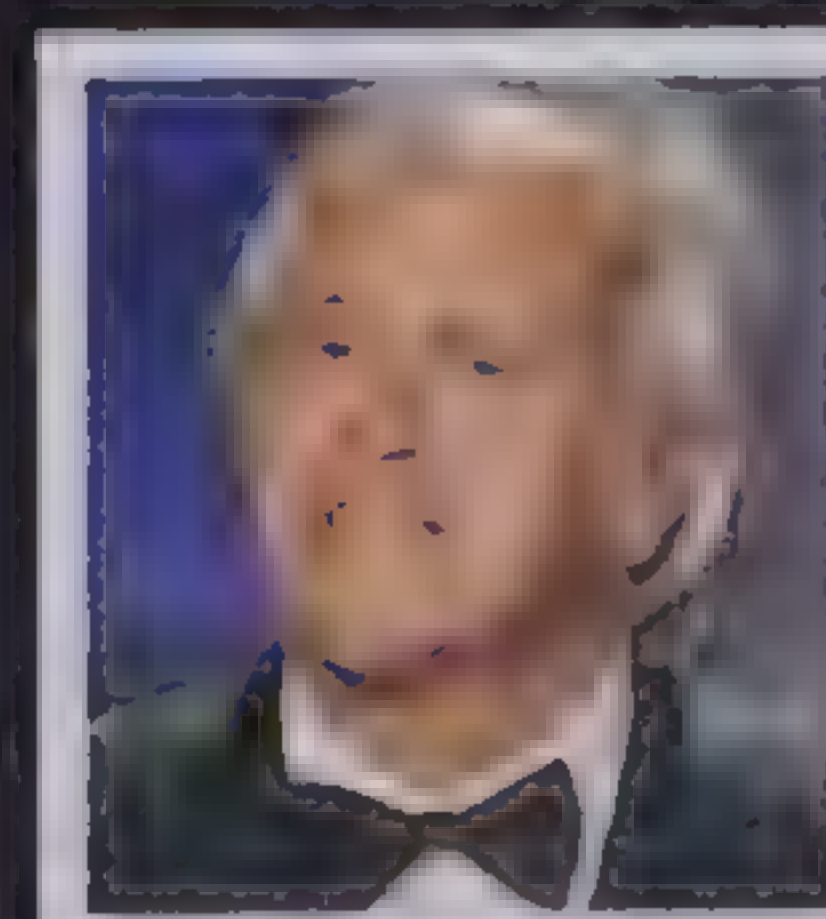


— George "The Animal" Steele



"Even today with Olympics and Super Bowls and stuff like that, the phenomenon of Hulk in the mid-80s got more of the heaviest hitters in the world to come to me for tickets to either a Saturday Night's Main Event or a WrestleMania."

From 1984, certainly to the back end of the 80s and into the early 90s, Hulkamania was immense, and Vince and Hulk rode it well."



— Dick Ebersol

“ I have always said that Hulk Hogan was quagmire in a sea of hypocrisy. And I meant it. When he talks for two minutes on TV, he doesn't walk the walk. And I know it. But he was very good at vibrating the TV. He could make the TV shake; I couldn't. He made them listen. And he got them in the palm of his hands, but did he do it in the long run? He was saying good things, but he wasn't applying it to himself. He was cheating, he was lying, and he was swearing. And that's what I mean by him being quagmire in a sea of hypocrisy. It was good enough for your kids, but it wasn't good enough for him. He wasn't going to live up to it. He took the easy road behind the scenes. Anybody could do it. It's the easy road; it's the downhill road. Where is his life now? Where is he at right now? He made the wrong decision and he knows it and he knows I was right. He won't question that at all. I'm his role model. ”

— Bob Backlund



“ Working with Hogan was great. I knew there was always going to be a payday on the other end of the “Eye of the Tiger.”

He may not have been the best this or the best that, but nobody could draw like him. He was the man... It was a breeze working with Hogan. You didn't have to work for heat. You didn't have to work for nothing. Everything was there. He just took it and ran with it. ”

— Don Muraco



“ I don't think Hulkamania would've happened in the AWA. Verne's objective at the time was more of the old wrestling promoter's style. Vince was projecting himself to do bigger things, much bigger... Vince was going to set an agenda that no other promoter had ever done. And he did it. And you know he put time and money into it. ”

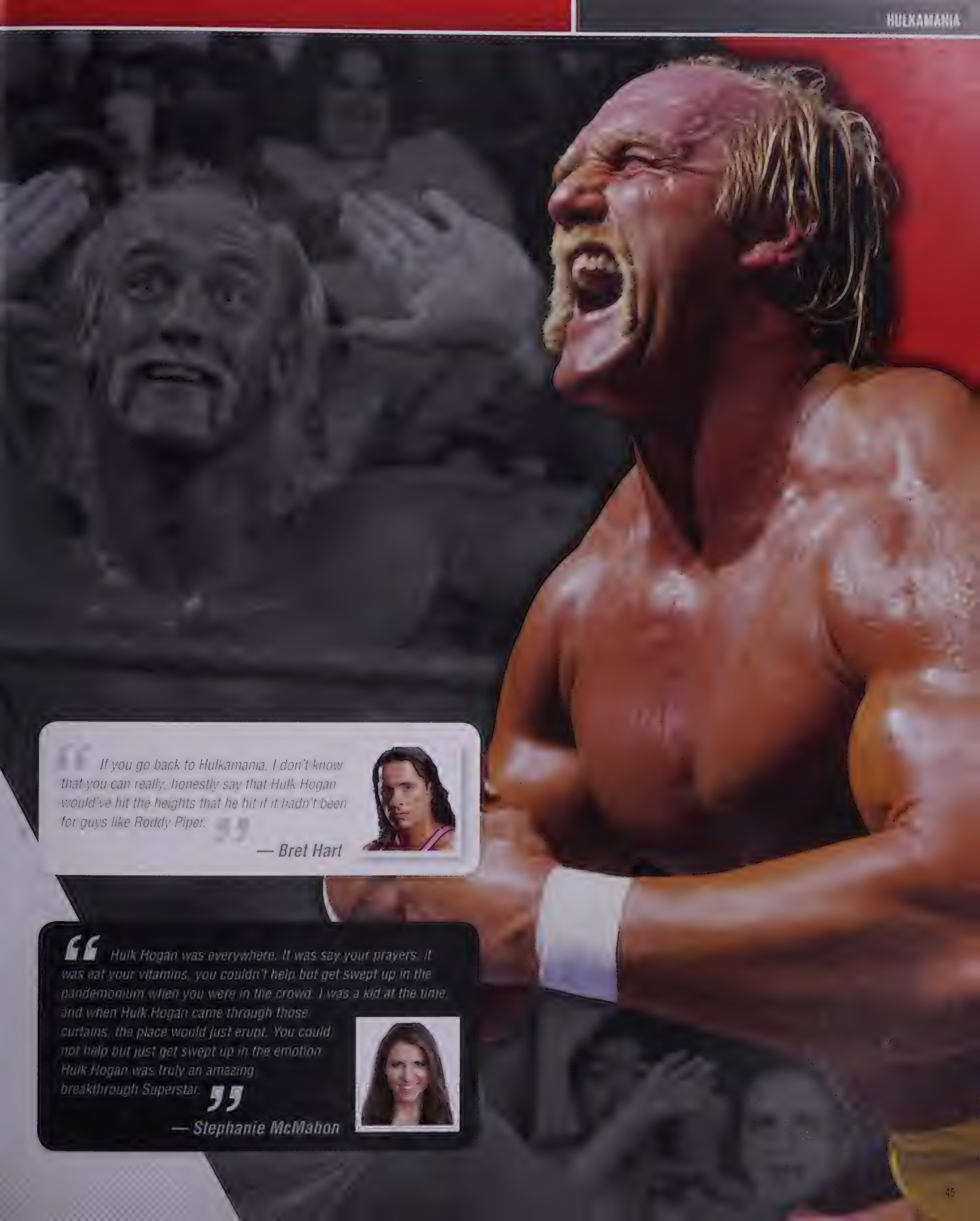
— Nick Bockwinkel



“ Hulk was at the right time and the right place, and he was also the right size. Here's a guy that was huge, but he could move too. And he was fun and he could talk. If you can move and talk, you can move people right into the arena. So Hulk did a pretty good job of that. And for the first time, a 300-pound bald guy was your hero. ”

— Larry Zbyszko





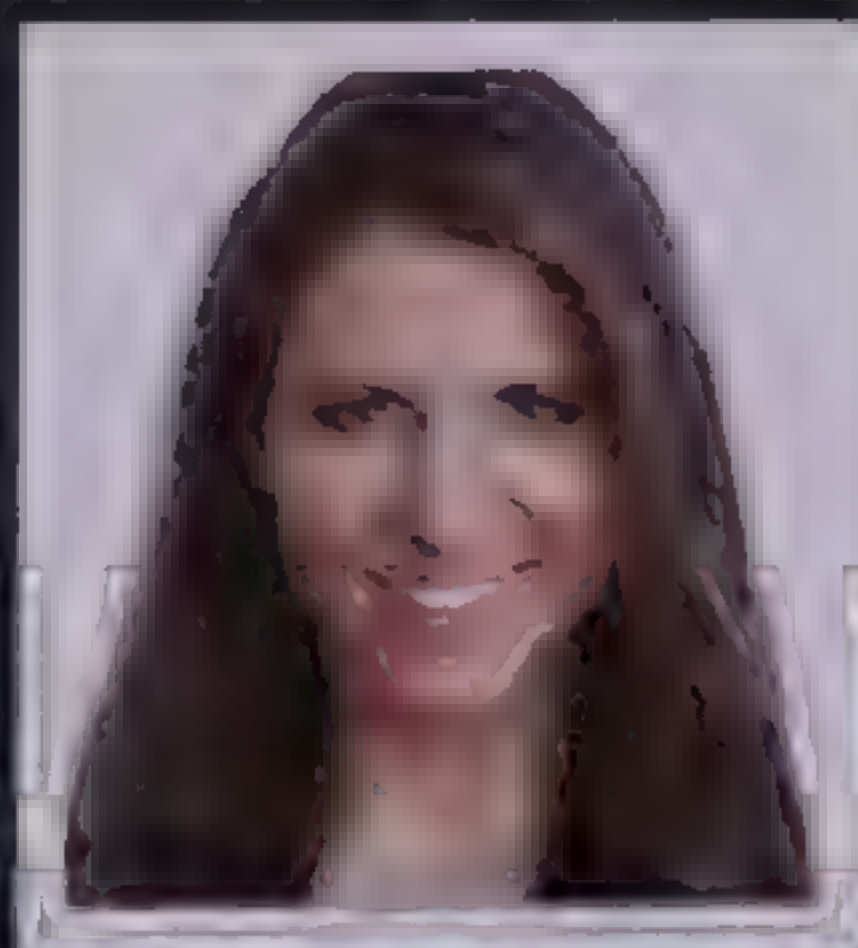
“ If you go back to Hulkamania, I don't know that you can really, honestly say that Hulk Hogan would've hit the heights that he hit if it hadn't been for guys like Roddy Piper. ”

— Bret Hart



“ Hulk Hogan was everywhere. It was say your prayers. It was eat your vitamins, you couldn't help but get swept up in the pandemonium when you were in the crowd. I was a kid at the time, and when Hulk Hogan came through those curtains, the place would just erupt. You could not help but just get swept up in the emotion Hulk Hogan was truly an amazing breakthrough Superstar. ”

— Stephanie McMahon





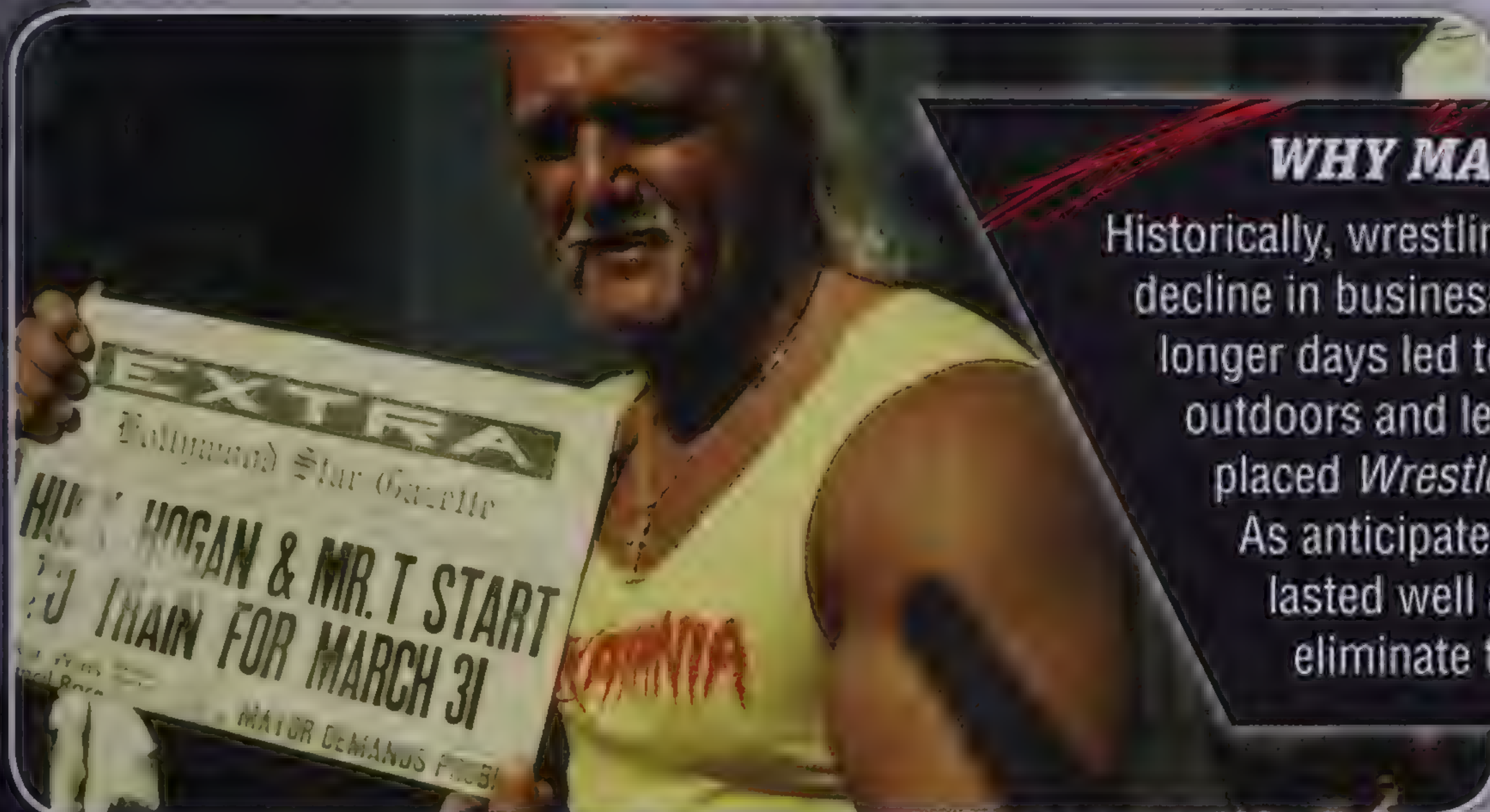
WRESTLEMANIA



The idea came to Vince McMahon while lying on a beach during a rare vacation. The NFL had the Super Bowl, he thought. And the movie, television, and music industries had the Oscars, Emmys, and Grammys, respectively. So why couldn't wrestling also have its own extravaganza where rivalries culminated and the industry was celebrated?

By this time, McMahon had already assumed full ownership of WWE and begun his expansion into other regions of the nation. His company also boasted the business' best roster of Superstars, which included the likes of Hulk Hogan, Andre the Giant, and "Rowdy" Roddy Piper. So a major event such as the one McMahon envisioned was the next logical step toward growing the WWE business.

A handful of WWE's most trusted employees sat in a conference room in WWE's corporate headquarters in Greenwich, Connecticut, as McMahon described his vision. He explained that the goal was to combine both a wrestling and entertainment presence to create a mainstream mega-event. New York's Madison Square Garden would be the site, and March 31, 1985, would be the date. The foundation of what would become sports-entertainment's single greatest event had been cemented.



WHY MARCH 31, 1985?

Historically, wrestling oftentimes experienced an annual decline in business after daylight savings time. The longer days led to people spending more time outdoors and less at arenas. To combat this, WWE placed *WrestleMania* just prior to the cyclical dip. As anticipated, the buzz *WrestleMania* generated lasted well after the event and helped permanently eliminate the annual decline in business.

RISKY BUSINESS

Today, *WrestleMania* is recognized as the crown jewel of the sports-entertainment calendar, thanks in large part to the enormous economic impact it has on both WWE and its host cities. But while its success is undeniable now, producing such a supercard in 1985 was not without risk.

At the time, pay-per-view television was still fighting to find its footing in the industry. So unlike the *WrestleManias* of today, WWE could not rely on the technology to broadcast the event across the country. Instead, WWE used the high-risk method of closed-circuit television.

"The first *WrestleMania* is probably something I would've never had the courage to have done on my own," admits Linda McMahon. "We had been bankrupt in 1976, so in terms of history, it really hadn't been that long, and those thoughts stayed in your mind. It was a gamble; we really hocked everything we owned for *WrestleMania I*, because in those days, it was closed circuit. So in every arena where we offered closed circuit, we had to rent projectors, landlines for microwave transmission of the event, redundant projectors...Typically, in the boxing world at that time, there were promoters all over the country who assumed that risk. This time, it was us. We assumed every bit of that risk."

THE CELEBRITY EFFECT

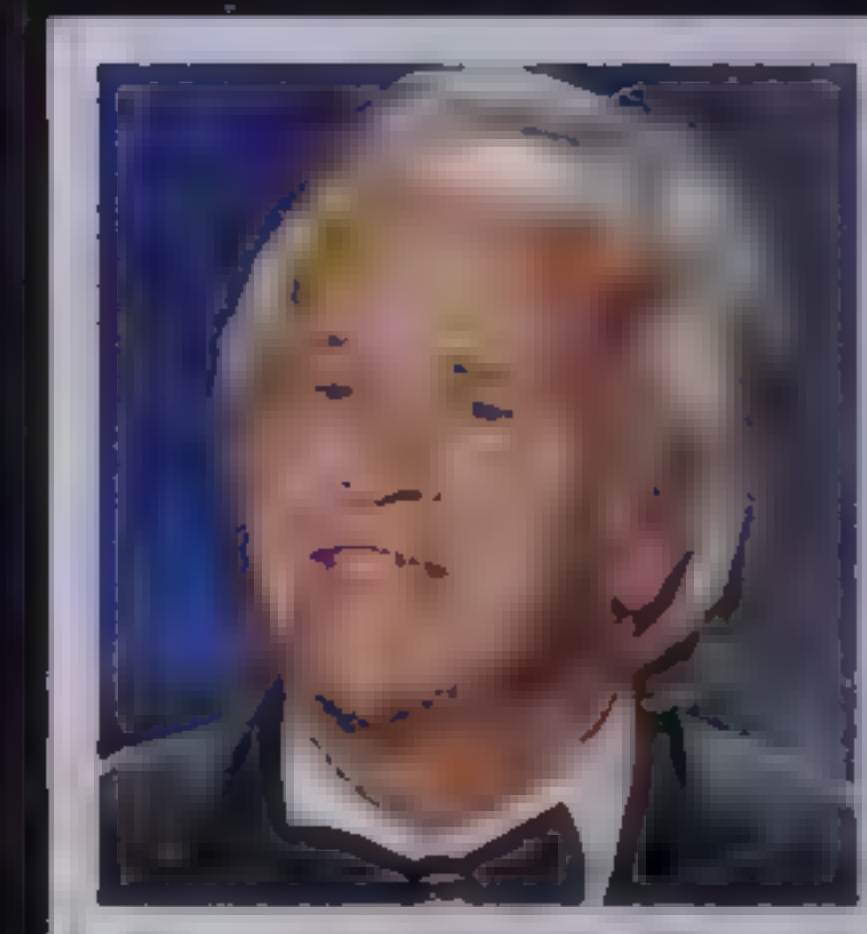
While nearly every dollar in the McMahon bank account was being earmarked for closed-circuit television locations across the country, WWE was also busy securing the final piece of the *WrestleMania* puzzle: A-list celebrities.

Among the luminaries eager to attach themselves to the emerging *WrestleMania* brand were The Rockettes, Liberace, New York Yankees manager Billy Martin, and Cyndi Lauper, who was quickly becoming a WWE regular. In July 1984, the popular singer was in Wendi Richter's corner when she defeated The Fabulous Moolah for the Women's Championship on the MTV broadcast of WWE's *The Brawl to End It All*. The show scored an impressive 9.0 rating and helped launch MTV's February 1985 presentation, *The War to Settle the Score*, which also featured Lauper. Today, many historians credit Lauper's WWE involvement with the advent of the popular Rock 'n' Wrestling Connection.

Muhammad Ali was also scheduled to be the referee for the night's main event. But when the boxing legend showed up that afternoon, something seemed off.

“ To people in show business, *WrestleMania* has a great name. It's that rare event that was created in the last 30 years that's stuck. And the only way it sticks is if the public really believes they've gotten their money's worth out of it. **”**

— Dick Ebersol



“I went to talk to Muhammad Ali,” remembers Pat Patterson. “He was very nice, but he was kind of not there. I didn’t know at the time that he was starting to get sick. I remember thinking that there was no way he could referee the match.”

Patterson voiced his concerns to McMahon, who agreed that a change needed to be made. Together, they decided to have Ali serve as the special referee outside the ring, while Patterson assumed the in-ring responsibilities.

“It worked out well because I was there when Orndorff and Piper were beating the crap out of Mr. T. Ali hit the ring and he wanted to beat the crap out of Orndorff and Piper. I thought to myself, ‘He’s going to screw this whole match up.’ So I waist locked him and got him out of the ring. It was unbelievable; he wanted to get those guys so bad.”

Unfortunately for WWE, Ali wasn't the only celebrity that had the company scrambling. Mr. T, who teamed with Hulk Hogan in the main event, also provided for some tense moments behind the scenes. In addition to regularly showing up late or unprepared, the *A-Team* star also went so far as to inexplicably fire a WWE employee out of the blue (the firing didn't stick). While he was great for mainstream exposure, Mr. T quickly became a nuisance to employees and Superstars alike.

“In my opinion, and I’ve told him this to his face, Mr. T was the most unprofessional piece of work that I have ever had the displeasure of being associated with.”



— Mean Gene Okerlund

“I was supposed to be in the match with Hulk Hogan,” recalls Jimmy Snuka. “Then they came and told me Mr. T was going to be wrestling with Hulk Hogan, and they wanted me to be outside like a manager. I kind of lost it, brother. To be very honest, I didn’t feel good about it. The whole thing was supposed to be me and Hulk Hogan. So when that happened, I was very disappointed and still am today.”



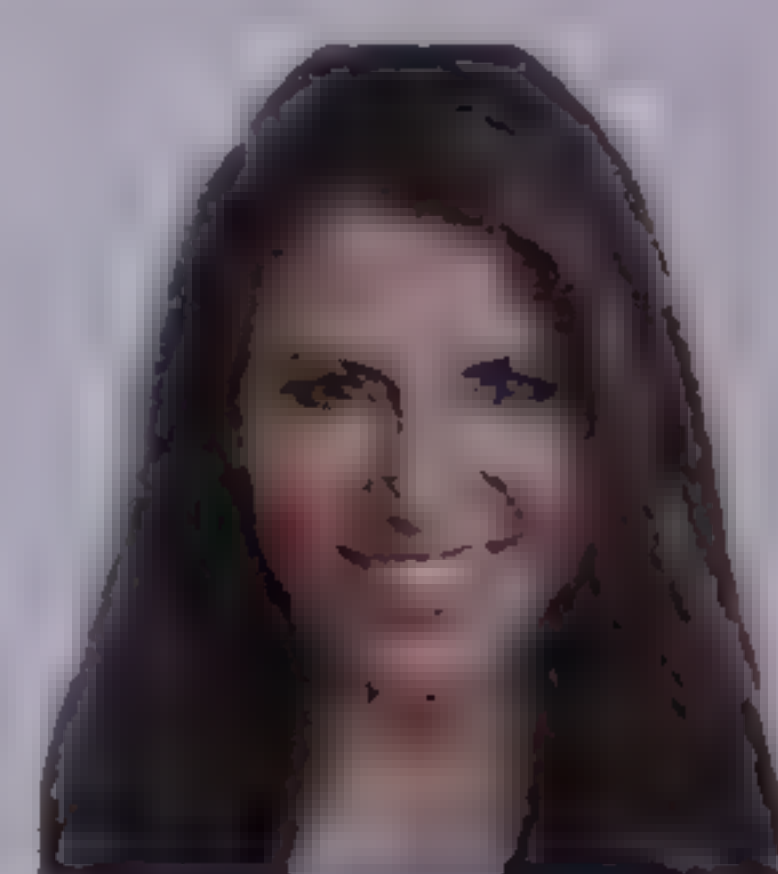


Ticket from WrestleMania I

A WINNER IS BORN

When it was all said and done, the unique combination of pageantry, celebrity, and an elite card proved to be a success, just as Vince McMahon had envisioned that fateful day on the beach. To celebrate, McMahon threw an extravagant after party, a *WrestleMania* tradition that still exists today, at the famed Rainbow Room atop 30 Rockefeller Plaza. And as WWE employees and Superstars celebrated the success of the live event, results from closed-circuit locations across the country continued to file in, all affirming that *WrestleMania* was a hit.

Most of all, I remember the after party, which was held at the Rainbow Room, which no longer exists. I was sitting in Andre the Giant's lap when *People* magazine came and took a photo of us and captured my first *WrestleMania* event.



— Stephanie McMahon

"We we're getting reports from auditors from all over the country from the closed circuit events," remembers Linda McMahon. "I think it was about a quarter to three in the morning when I went to Vince—we were both up all night—and said, 'We have just broken even,' and it was like, 'Wow!' That was just an unbelievable moment to know that the next morning, the letter of credit wasn't going to be called and that we were going to be in the black for *WrestleMania I*. We could finally feel relieved."



Along with the feeling of relief came an undeniable sense of excitement for the future. Thanks to this one singular event, one that combined sports and entertainment like no event ever before, WWE underwent an overnight evolution. No longer was wrestling saddled with the undesirable image of being held in smoky armories. Thanks to *WrestleMania*, WWE had evolved into sports-entertainment, a Madison Avenue darling, and a permanent slice of Americana.

WrestleMania I

BODYSLAM CHALLENGE:

» Andre the Giant defeated Big John Studd



INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP:

» Junkyard Dog defeated Greg Valentine (c) via count-out

OTHER MATCHES:

» Ricky Steamboat defeated Matt Borne

» King Kong Bundy defeated Special Delivery Jones

*Shirt and bow tie worn by referee Dick Kroll,
referee of three matches at WrestleMania I*

WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP:

» Wendi Richter defeated Leilani Kai (c)



Shirt and bow tie worn by referee Dick Kroll to referee
3 matches at the First Wrestlemania
March 31, 1985
-Madison Square Garden-

Wendi Richter with Cyndi Lauper pinned
Leilani Kai with Fabulous Moolah
to regain Women's World Title
Intercontinental Champion Greg Valentine lost by
countout to Junkyard Dog
King Kong Bundy pinned S.D. Jones
in a record 9 seconds

► Tito Santana defeated The Executioner



► Bruno Sammartino was in the corner of his son, David, when he battled Brutus Beefcake to a no-contest



▶ Paul Orndorff with "Cowboy" Bob Orton



WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP:

▶ Nikolai Volkoff and Iron Sheik defeated Mike Rotundo & Barry Windham (c)



▶ Hulk Hogan and Mr. T defeated Roddy Piper and Paul Orndorff



STARS OF THE EARLY- TO-MID 1980s

HULK HOGAN

Following his WWE Championship victory over The Iron Sheik in January 1984, Hulk Hogan became synonymous with sports-entertainment's big boom period of the mid-1980s.



THE IRON SHEIK



One of history's most hated Superstars, The Iron Sheik combined an unmatched athleticism and technical wherewithal to claim both the WWE and World Tag Team Championships.

ANDRE THE GIANT

Andre the Giant's popularity transcended the wrestling ring. At 7'4" and 540 pounds, the "Eighth Wonder of the World" was a true pop-culture phenomenon, excelling in the ring, on television, and in movies.



PEDRO MORALES

Years after his successful WWE Championship reign, Pedro Morales held the Intercontinental Title for more than 600 days in the early 1980s.



TITO SANTANA

Tito Santana defeated The Executioner in the first-ever *WrestleMania* match. The two-time Intercontinental Champion went on to compete in eight more *WrestleMania* events (although his *WrestleMania IX* appearance was untelevised).



JUNKYARD DOG

After a memorable run in Mid-South Wrestling, Junkyard Dog jumped to WWE in 1984 and became one of the promotion's most colorful personalities.



GREG VALENTINE



A master of the figure-four leglock, Greg Valentine shined as both a singles and tag competitor. The Hammer's versatility guided him to both the Intercontinental and World Tag Team Championships.

RANDY SAVAGE

Colorful. Intense. Daring. Bold. Randy Savage was all these things and more. Over the course of his WWE career, "Macho Man" combined his unique set of characteristics to become a true household name.



WENDI RICHTER

Wendi Richter, managed by pop star Cyndi Lauper, used her popularity as one of the faces of the Rock 'n' Wrestling craze to help elevate the women's division in the 1980s.



BOB BACKLUND



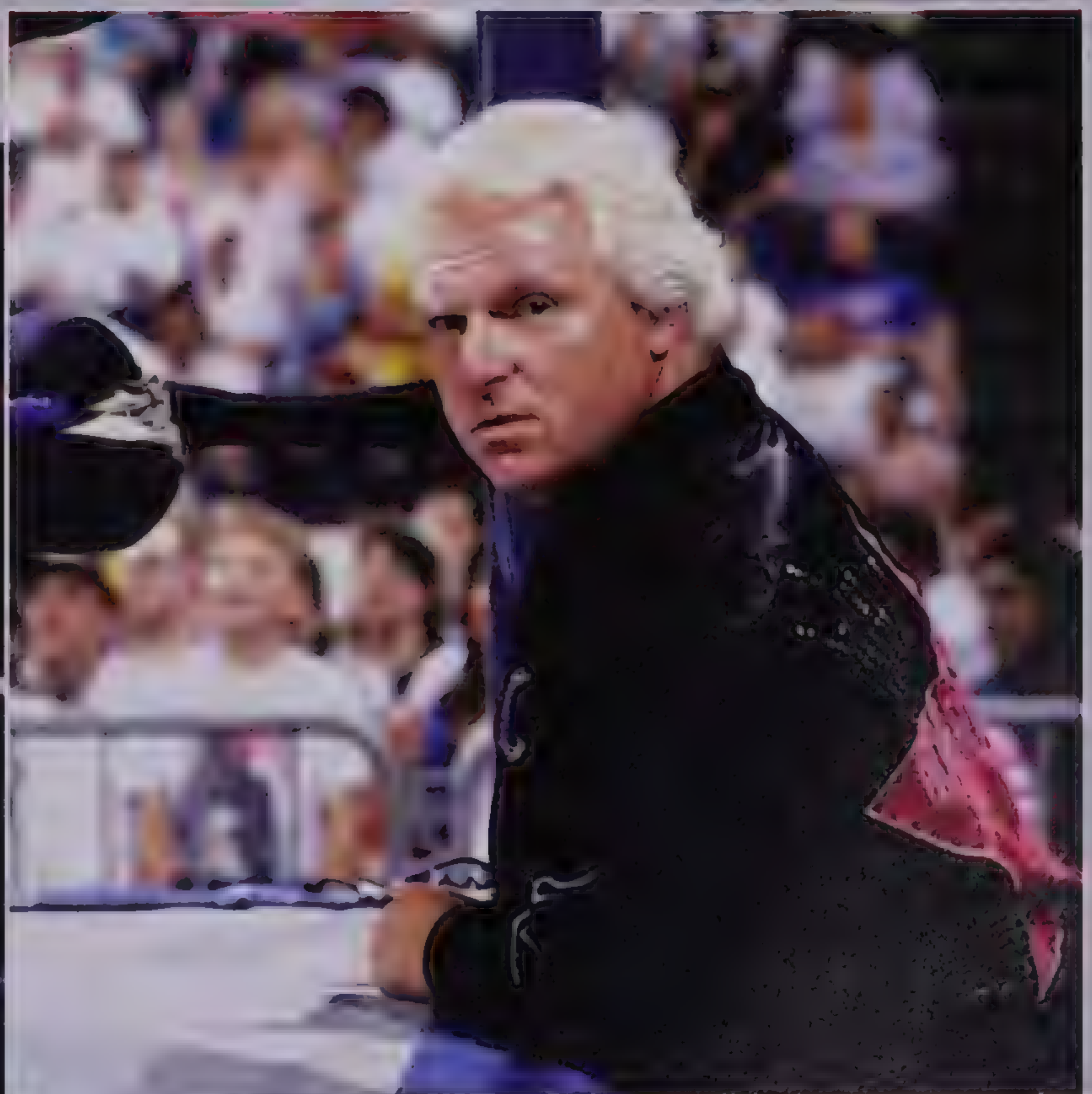
Behind a combination of boy-next-door good looks and unequalled athleticism, Bob Backlund proved to be WWE's top star of the early 1980s. At an impressive 2,135 days, Backlund has the second-longest WWE Championship reign in history.

BIG JOHN STUDD

Standing nearly seven-feet tall and weighing 365 pounds, Big John Studd was a near-unstoppable giant in the ring.



BOBBY HEENAN



Regularly regarded as one of the greatest managers in sports-entertainment history, Bobby "The Brain" Heenan steered the careers of such legends as Andre the Giant, Mr. Perfect, and Rick Rude.

DON MURACO

Don Muraco's Hall of Fame career is highlighted by his two lengthy Intercontinental Championship reigns of the early 1980s. In history, only Pedro Morales had the title longer than Muraco.



ROWDY RODDY PIPER

One of history's greatest antagonists, Roddy Piper proved to be the ultimate foe during Hulk Hogan's rise to the top in the 1980s.



COWBOY BOB ORTON

Despite competing with a broken forearm that simply refused to heal, Bob Orton earned a reputation as one of his generation's toughest in-ring combatants.



PAUL ORNDORFF

With his destructive piledriver and granite-like physique, Paul Orndorff earned every bit of his "Mr. Wonderful" moniker.



JIMMY SNUKA

Decades later, Jimmy Snuka's awe-arousing Superfly Splash is still regarded as one of the sports-entertainment's most influential moves.



FREDDIE BLASSIE

Claiming to be a Hollywood fashion plate, Freddie Blassie certainly did not suffer from self-esteem issues. The confident and cunning manager controlled the careers of many top stars, most notably The Iron Sheik.



GOING MAINSTREAM

FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT

WWE's skyrocketing popularity was undeniable following the success of *WrestleMania*. And it wasn't long before new doors began to open for the booming promotion at every turn, including the production of a music album and weekly Saturday Morning cartoon. But perhaps no new venture was as important to WWE's success than its inclusion on network television. In the three decades prior to *WrestleMania*, network TV balked at the idea of presenting sports-entertainment on its airwaves. But that all changed when Marty Klein, president of the Agency for the Performing Arts, talked to NBC's Dick Ebersol about potentially partnering with WWE for a late-night series.

"My first reaction was, 'You've got to be nuts,'" recalls Ebersol. "There's no way I'm going to slip this by NBC. They're not going to let me put wrestling on network television."



Hulk Hogan defeats "Cowboy" Bob Orton to retain the WWE Championship

"Cowboy" Bob Orton (with Roddy Piper) battles Hulk Hogan (with Mr. T) for the WWE Championship on the network premiere of Saturday Night's Main Event on May 11, 1985



A few days later, Ebersol told David Letterman about Klein's idea. Rather than dismiss it, as Ebersol expected, Letterman urged the NBC executive to seriously consider the WWE partnership. Heeding the talk show host's advice, Ebersol met with Vince McMahon to investigate a potential deal.

"We hit it off right away. I knew inside of ten minutes that Vince was a really great guy and one that I'd have a lot of fun with," says Ebersol. "We just took to each other right from the very beginning and in less than nine weeks, I came up with the name *Saturday Night's Main Event*. We put the first one on Mother's Day weekend, and it was the highest-rated show of the year in that time period."

Saturday Night's
MAIN EVENT

Based off the success of the first *Saturday Night's Main Event*, NBC ordered the new WWE program as a monthly series starting in October 1985. Over the course of the next seven years, *Saturday Night's Main Event* established itself as a ratings juggernaut. It was also home to some of sports-entertainment's most memorable moments, including the controversial Steel Cage Match between Hulk Hogan and Paul Orndorff, the formation of the Mega Powers, and Shawn Michaels' Intercontinental Championship victory over the British Bulldog.

Mega Powers members: Randy Savage and Hulk Hogan



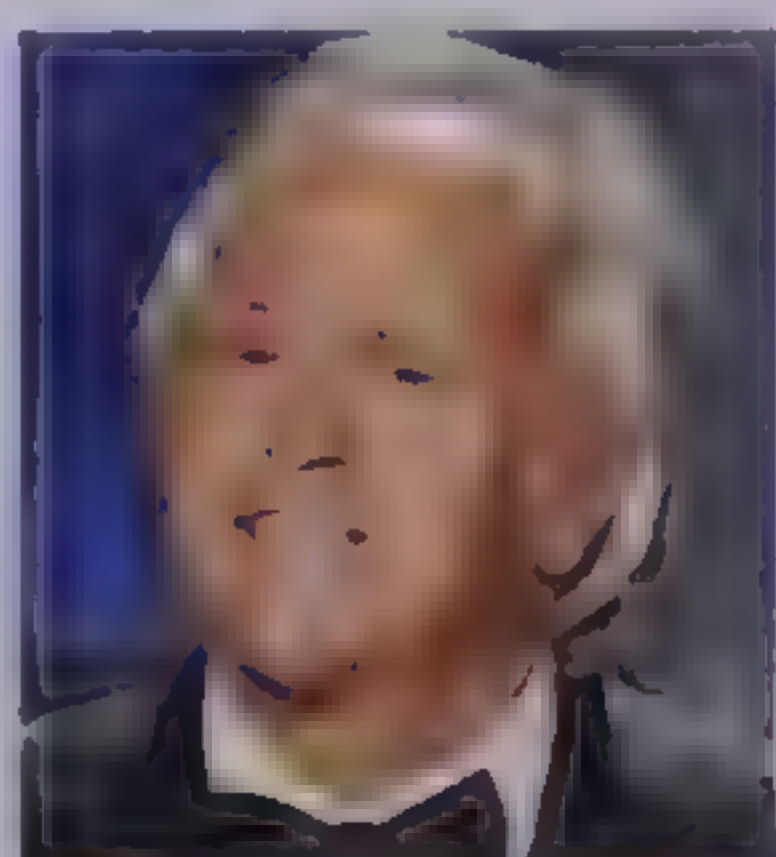
Steel Cage Match between Hulk Hogan and Paul Orndorff



Shawn Michaels defeats the British Bulldog to win the Intercontinental Championship



If anything ever happened to me, I don't think it would be a bad thing if my kids chose to mentor under Vince McMahon. That's how highly I think of him.



— **Dick Ebersol**

PIONEERING PAY-PER-VIEW

Pay-per-view events have been a sports-entertainment staple for more than twenty years. In November 1985, however, the idea of utilizing the relatively new technology to broadcast a live event was somewhat foreign. But that didn't stop WWE from breaking into the pay-per-view business with *The Wrestling Classic*.

"*WrestleMania I* made its money in closed circuit; at the time, there just weren't many pay-per-view houses available," recalls Basil DeVito, head of WWE's first marketing group. "So there was not a prescribed plan on how pay-per-view would go or if it even made sense for us to be on pay-per-view."

Not knowing how its fans would respond, WWE cautiously set out into the uncharted waters of pay-per-view television. Realizing many of its fans still didn't have access to pay-per-view, WWE chose to infuse as little storyline into the event as possible, so as not to alienate the masses without access to the new technology. In the end, fans who were lucky enough to see the event rejoiced when Junkyard Dog defeated Randy Savage in the finals of a 16-Superstar tournament. Behind the scenes, WWE officials were equally excited about their first foray into pay-per-view and were already planning the company's next big event.

Hulk Hogan defeats Roddy Piper to retain the WWE Championship on the first pay-per-view, *The Wrestling Classic*, on November 7, 1985



Just a few short months after *The Wrestling Classic*, WWE continued to blaze its trail through the pay-per-view business when it produced *WrestleMania 2*. Unlike the first *WrestleMania*, the follow-up event emanated from three separate venues across the country: New York's Nassau Coliseum, Chicago's Rosemont Horizon, and Los Angeles' Sports Arena.

The unique presentation provided fans with a memory that no entertainment outlet has been able to duplicate since. For WWE, however, the nuisances of producing such an involved event weighed heavy.

"It was very complex having to shift between all these places," says Ebersol, who maintained a strong working relationship with WWE outside of *Saturday Night's Main Event*. "Artistically, it was okay, but I don't think Vince or I were completely happy with it and I don't think anybody ever wanted to do it spread out over three cities again."

Complexities aside, holding *WrestleMania 2* in three separate venues benefited WWE greatly at the box office. Combined, the event drew more than 40,000 fans, which more than doubled the attendance of the first *WrestleMania*. Hoping to continue the momentum, Vince McMahon began to think of ways to outdraw both *WrestleManias* combined in one night.

McMahon eventually selected the Silverdome in Pontiac, Michigan, as the host of *WrestleMania III*. The colossal venue housed 80,000 fans for football, and once the additional seats were added to the floor, it expanded to hold more than 90,000. Putting that many fans in one stadium for *WrestleMania* seemed unfathomable, but McMahon had a plan, one that included getting Andre the Giant back inside a WWE ring, which wouldn't be an easy task. At the time, Andre was in Europe shooting *The Princess Bride*. But even more troubling was the fact that he was suffering from a severe back condition that was slowly crippling him.

"His back was just killing him," recalls McMahon. "It was sad in a way, but from a reality standpoint, Andre was ready to die."

At first, the downtrodden Giant turned down McMahon's offer to battle Hulk Hogan in the main event of *WrestleMania III*. But McMahon was determined to change his mind, and after much convincing, Andre eventually agreed.

Getting the Giant on board was only a fraction of the plan. An operation was also required to not only get Andre in ring shape, but more importantly to improve his overall quality of life.

"Quite frankly, this operation never would have happened in the US," says McMahon. "The Brits have been and probably continue to be a little more liberal in terms of what they do from a medical standpoint."

"Andre really did want this. He said, 'Okay, I'll give myself one last shot at living life.' And he had the operation, which didn't necessarily have to be a success, but it was. Andre then came back to the states and started training in Stamford, as well as in my home in Greenwich, Connecticut. I was very fortunate to have a gym, a very good sized one, in my house. Andre would come religiously, and it was the first time he had ever trained with weights. His response was tremendous. It was like, 'Oh my god. Why didn't you do this before?' And as he rehabbed, he'd ask me, 'Are you sure, boss?' And I'd tell him, 'Yes, Andre. I'm sure; you're going to break a record.' I was positive this match would break a record."

And it did. The fascination of the "Eighth Wonder of the World" challenging the "Hulkster" for the WWE Championship attracted an amazing 93,173 fans, which was an indoor attendance record that stood for more than 20 years.



HEAD TO HEAD

While WWE was establishing itself as a pioneer in the pay-per-view business, Jim Crockett Promotions was experiencing its own success with *Starrcade*. Created in 1983, *Starrcade* was an annual supercard (much like *WrestleMania*) that featured elite matches. Unlike WWE's event, though, the first four *Starrcades* were only offered via closed-circuit television. It wasn't until Thanksgiving 1987 that Jim Crockett Promotions put its premiere event on pay-per-view.

On paper, the move to pay-per-view seemed like the next logical step in the evolution of *Starrcade*. Unfortunately for Jim Crockett Promotions though, WWE elected to debut its new *Survivor Series* pay-per-view on the exact same night.

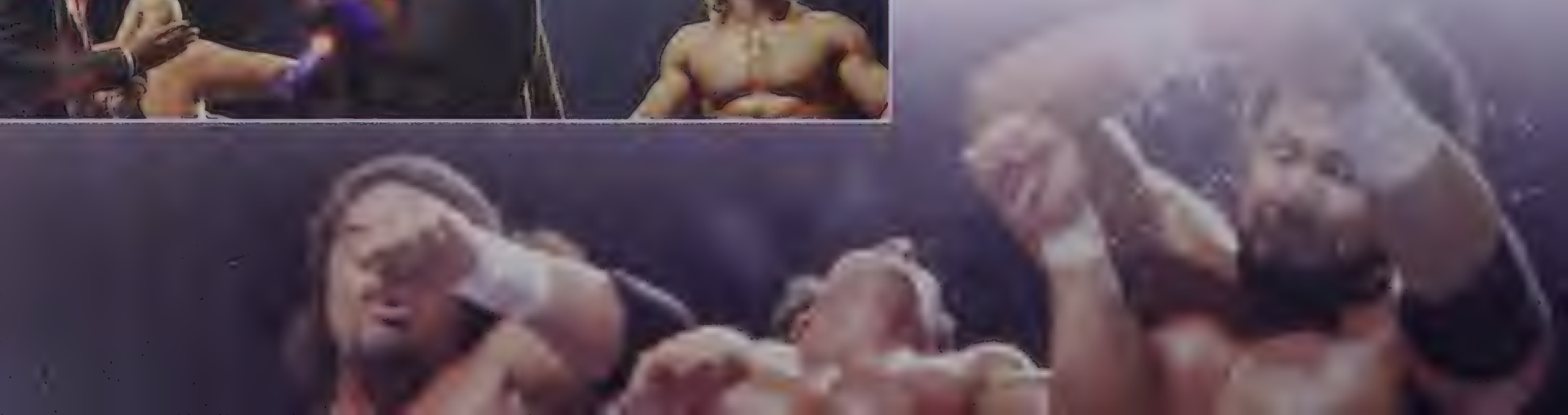
SURVIVOR SERIES



"The only thing that bothered me is that Vince also chose Thanksgiving," says Jim Crockett Promotions executive David Crockett. "That wasn't very nice of him. That's his business, of course. I think it's a compliment. He probably saw something we were doing and said, 'Okay, I can do that better.'"



From a viewership standpoint, Crockett was right; WWE's Thanksgiving offering was better: *Starrcade* garnered a 3.30 buy rate, while *Survivor Series* earned a 7.0. But that impressive number did not come without controversy.

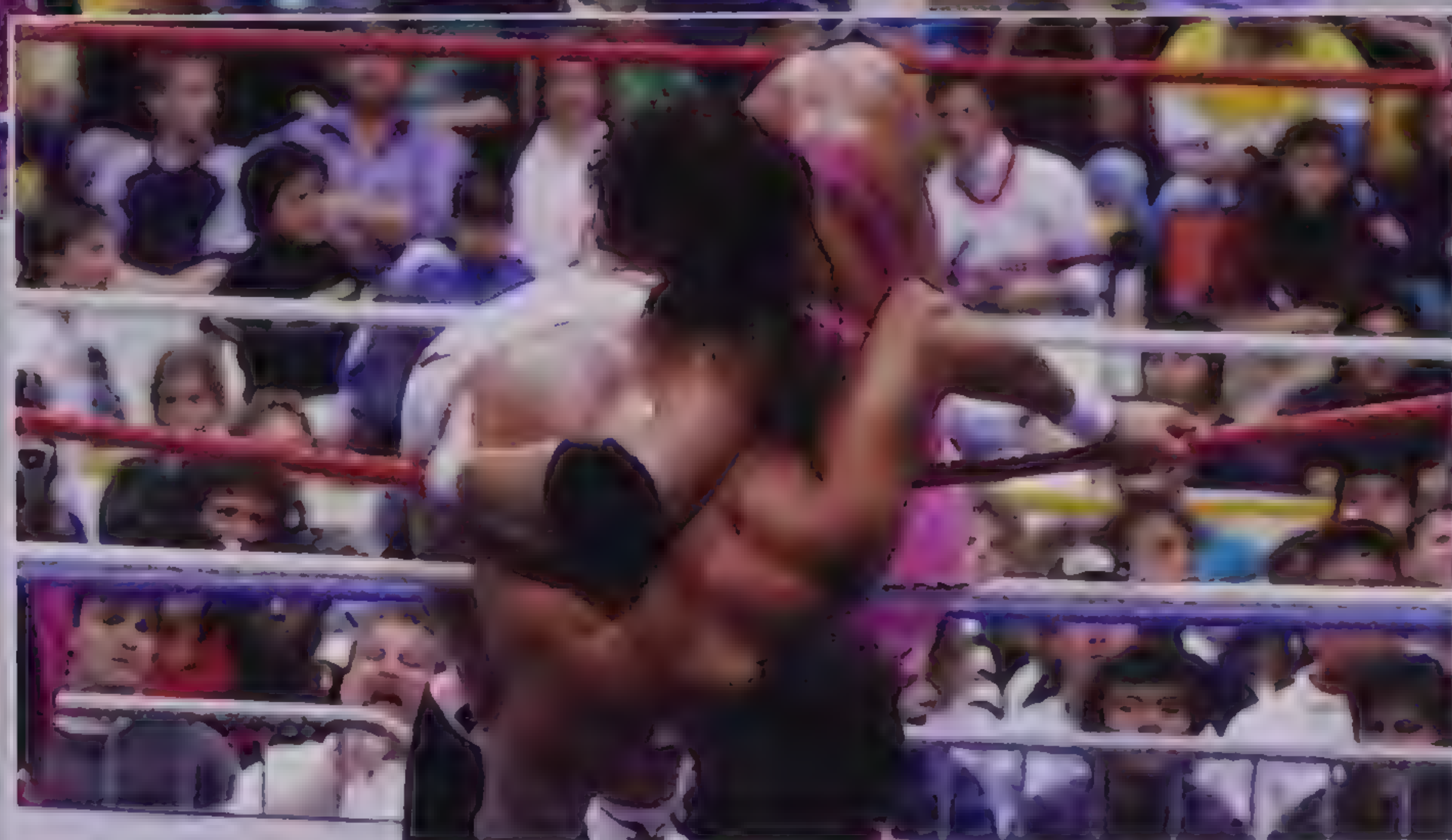


"Vince did threaten the cable systems about not showing us," claims Crockett regarding the allegations that McMahon told cable providers they would not get *WrestleMania IV* if they chose to offer *Starrcade*. "I resented it. But in hindsight, I might have done the same thing. Why not? If you can step on the neck of the snake, then you do it. He is in the business for himself, not to be a nice guy."

Crockett's second attempt at pay-per-view success didn't go much better. On January 24, 1988, the company produced *Bunkhouse Stampede*, featuring eight of its top stars competing in a steel cage. On that same night, WWE held its first-ever *Royal Rumble*. Making matters worse for Crockett, WWE's special was offered on free television via the USA Network.



ROYAL RUMBLE®



More than 20 years later, the *Royal Rumble* is one of the sports-entertainment calendar's most anticipated events, but it almost didn't see the light of day. Having retired from the ring, Pat Patterson not only served as a popular commentator, but as an important creative consultant to Vince McMahon and WWE. In late 1987, the *Royal Rumble* was just an idea in Patterson's head, an idea that McMahon didn't necessarily like. According to Patterson, McMahon dismissed the idea immediately, claiming the match would last far too long.

So Patterson tucked his idea away, assuming it was dead forever. It wasn't until the planning stages of the USA special that the idea resurfaced. While going over the event's proposed card, Ebersol claimed the show needed some additional firepower.

"That's when Vince turned to me and said, 'Tell Ebersol your stupid idea,'" recalls Patterson. "And I'll never forget his reaction. Dick Ebersol turned to Vince and said, 'Every two minutes we'll get a legal run-in? This is great TV; the people will go crazy.'"





"Hacksaw" Jim Duggan becomes first-ever Royal Rumble winner

56 We gave the concept of the match to the creative services department. The next day, they gave us 50 names to choose from. What stood out to me was the Royal Rumble. The word "royal" sounded good in there.

— Pat Patterson



As predicted, fans went crazy for the new concept. Since that fateful production meeting, some of history's greatest Superstars went on to win the *Royal Rumble*, including Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair, Stone Cold Steve Austin, and Undertaker. But in 1988, it was "Hacksaw" Jim Duggan who forever etched his name in history as the first-ever *Royal Rumble* winner.

"It was great," recalls Duggan. "I actually thought I was on more of a fast track than I ended up being on. You know, World Champion or something like that. That never happened. But just to win that first *Royal Rumble* is something I still hang my hat on today."

LARGER THAN LIFE

Two short months later, Crockett gave McMahon a dose of his own medicine when he created *Clash of the Champions* and held it on free television opposite *WrestleMania IV*. Historically, the Crockett promotion will be remembered as the home of some of history's greatest matches. And *Clash of the Champions* was no exception, particularly the Ric Flair-versus-Sting main event and the World Tag Team Title Match, pitting Barry Windham and Lex Luger against Tully Blanchard and Arn Anderson.

"We concentrated on the bell-to-bell action," recalls Anderson. "We didn't have the splendor; we didn't have all the gala, or the bells and whistles. It was basically a blood-and-guts promotion. And we felt at the time that we could out-perform bell-to-bell their guys. That's what we promoted, that's what we pushed. Our work rate is what we hung our hat on versus all the pomp and circumstance that Vince brought."



Despite Crockett's great in-ring product, the viewing public had already picked its winner in the head-to-head war, and by year's end, Jim Crockett Promotions was forced to close its doors and sell its assets to Ted Turner for a reported \$9 million. For the fans, Crockett's great in-ring action just wasn't enough. They also demanded the larger than life, colorful characters WWE was presenting. And at *WrestleMania IV*, one of the most colorful characters of all time shined the brightest when Randy Savage defeated "The Million Dollar Man" Ted DiBiase to claim the WWE Championship.



"Having grown up in the business and being indoctrinated in old school, I didn't know what Vince was doing," admits DiBiase regarding McMahon's colorful product. "All the characters were very animated. And with the weddings and everything else, I thought he was killing our business. But it didn't take me long to realize that it was really a stroke of genius. When he took these characters and dressed them up in colorful outfits and made them over-the-top squeaky clean, he took wrestling and marketed it to the family."

Frankly, I didn't particularly care for the changes that were made. They were entitled because it's their business after all. But I didn't really care for that direction at all. And after a while, I decided that I didn't want to be part of it and that's when I left.

— Bruno Sammartino



Uncle Elmer's Wedding on Saturday Night's Main Event



WRESTLEMANIA

2-VIII

WRESTLEMANIA

Venue: Nassau Coliseum, Rosemont Horizon, Sports Arena,
Uniondale, NY - Rosemont, IL - Los Angeles, CA

Attendance: 40,058

WRESTLEMANIA
APRIL 7, 1986

Following the success of the first *WrestleMania*, WWE made the controversial decision to hold *WrestleMania 2* in three separate cities, with each locale hosting its own set of matches. The New York portion was highlighted by a boxing match between Roddy Piper and Mr. T; Chicago showcased a 20-man Battle Royal, featuring WWE Superstars and NFL players; and Los Angeles capped the night with the main event of Hulk Hogan vs. King Kong Bundy in a Steel Cage Match.

WWE/NFL BATTLE ROYAL:

› Andre the Giant won



*I was sitting right next to Vince when the satellite for *WrestleMania 2* went from New York to Chicago. He jumped out of his chair and screamed, 'Yeah' when the connection worked. If it hadn't worked, he was broke. He had all of his eggs in one basket and if that hadn't worked, he would've been out of business.*

— George Steele



INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Randy Savage (c) defeated George Steele

WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Fabulous Moolah (c) defeated Velvet McIntyre

BOXING MATCH:

› Mr. T defeated Roddy Piper by DQ



FLAG MATCH: › Corporal Kirchner defeated Nikolai Volkoff

WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP:

› British Bulldogs defeated The Dream Team (c)

OTHER MATCHES:

› Paul Orndorff vs. Don Muraco went to a double count-out

› Jake Roberts defeated George Wells

› Ricky Steamboat defeated Hercules

› Adrian Adonis defeated Uncle Elmer

› Terry and Hoss Funk defeated Tito Santana and Junkyard Dog

STEEL CAGE MATCH FOR THE WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Hulk Hogan (c) defeated King Kong Bundy



WRESTLEMANIA III

Venue: Pontiac Silverdome – Pontiac, MI

Attendance: 93,173

WRESTLEMANIA III
MARCH 29, 1987

By 1987, *WrestleMania* had cemented itself as the premiere live event in all of entertainment. To satisfy the overwhelming fan demand, WWE tapped the massive Pontiac Silverdome to host the event. A record number of fans walked through the turnstiles eagerly awaiting Hulk Hogan versus Andre the Giant in the main event. By night's end, however, many were talking about the Ricky Steamboat-Randy Savage match, one of the greatest contests in sports-entertainment history.

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Hulk Hogan (c) defeated Andre the Giant



INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Ricky Steamboat defeated Randy Savage (c)



HAIR MATCH: › Roddy Piper defeated Adrian Adonis

OTHER MATCHES:

› Can-Am Connection defeated Bob Orton and Don Muraco

› Billy Jack Haynes vs. Hercules went to a double count-out

› Hillbilly Jim, Little Beaver and The Haiti Kid defeated King Kong Bundy, Lord Littlebrook and Little Tokyo by DQ

› The Dream Team defeated The Rougeau Brothers

› Hart Foundation and Danny Davis defeated British Bulldogs and Tito Santana

› Butch Reed defeated Koko B. Ware

› Honky Tonk Man defeated Jake Roberts

› Nikolai Volkoff and Iron Sheik defeated Killer Bees by DQ



› King Harley Race defeated Junkyard Dog



We wanted to steal the show. We knew that Hogan and Andre drew it, but we had a big part in it also, but let's be real. We stole the night. I'll never forget that night. At the WrestleMania party afterwards, everybody started coming up and congratulating myself. Then I looked over at Randy, and everybody was congratulating him. It actually started a line of guys. It was Gorilla Monsoon and guys that were icons in our business that actually come up to shake my hand. Then I looked over at Hogan's table and there was nobody

— Ricky Steamboat



WRESTLEMANIA IV

Venue: Trump Plaza – Atlantic City, NJ
Attendance: 19,199

WRESTLEMANIA IV
MARCH 27, 1988

Topping the business impact of *WrestleMania III* seemed like an impossible task, but WWE pulled it off with *WrestleMania IV*, despite holding the event in the considerably smaller Trump Plaza in Atlantic City, New Jersey. First, ticket prices topped at \$150 (that equates to \$295 in today's money), which aided in surpassing the prior year's live gate. Then, the intrigue surrounding the tournament to crown a new WWE Champion drew a then-record 600,000 pay-per-view buys. In the end, Randy Savage defeated Ted DiBiase in the finals to claim the gold.

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP TOURNAMENT, ROUND 1

- › Ted DiBiase defeated Jim Duggan
- › Don Muraco defeated Dino Bravo by DQ
- › Greg Valentine defeated Ricky Steamboat
- › Randy Savage defeated Butch Reed
- › One Man Gang defeated Bam Bam Bigelow by count-out
- › Rick Rude vs. Jake Roberts went to a draw

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP TOURNAMENT, ROUND 2

- › Hulk Hogan vs. Andre the Giant ended in a double DQ
- › Ted DiBiase defeated Don Muraco
- › Randy Savage defeated Greg Valentine

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP TOURNAMENT, ROUND 3

- › Randy Savage defeated One Man Gang by DQ

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP TOURNAMENT, FINALS

- › Randy Savage defeated Ted DiBiase



BATTLE ROYAL: › Bad News Brown won

INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP:

- › Brutus Beefcake defeated Honky Tonk Man (c) by DQ

WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP:

- › Demolition defeated Strike Force (c)

OTHER MATCHES:

- › Ultimate Warrior defeated Hercules
- › The Islanders and Bobby Heenan defeated The British Bulldogs and Koko B. Ware

56 Randy didn't rob the people of seeing him for the first time, even though it was the fourth time [by night's end]. He took it very seriously. He didn't believe the match started when the bell rang; He believed the match started at the airport or hotel or wherever fans saw him. He believed that the match started when the dressing room door opened. When he made four separate entrances that night, he made sure he had all those different robes. He spent a lot of money on his wrestling attire. 55

— Lanny Poffo,
Randy Savage's brother



WRESTLEMANIA V

Venue: Trump Plaza – Atlantic City, NJ

Attendance: 20,369

WRESTLEMANIA V

APRIL 2, 1989

For the first and only time in history, the same venue hosted back-to-back *WrestleManias* when WWE brought its crown jewel back to Trump Plaza in 1989. On the surface, many might assume a repetitive locale would result in a stale product—but not in this case. The event, which featured Randy Savage defending his WWE Championship against Hulk Hogan in the main event, ushered in more than 1,000 additional fans than the previous year, and drew more than 200,000 more pay-per-view buys.

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Hulk Hogan defeated Randy Savage (c)



55 Holding *WrestleMania V* at Trump Plaza again was unique. It was the first of its kind, and it's never been done since. Why did we go back to back? First, you have the city itself. At that time, Atlantic City was a vibrant, thriving city. There was so much to do there for young and old alike. It had electricity; it had vigor; it had vitality; and it also had Donald Trump. Donald Trump is one of the most successful entrepreneurs in history. To have him there, with his expertise, combined with what WWE knows, was a winner across the board.



— Howard Finkel



WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP HANDICAP MATCH:

› Demolition (c) defeated Powers of Pain and Mr. Fuji

INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Rick Rude defeated Ultimate Warrior (c)

OTHER MATCHES:

› Hercules defeated King Haku

› Twin Towers defeated The Rockers

› Ted DiBiase vs. Brutus Beefcake ended in a double count-out

› Bushwhackers defeated The Rougeaus

› Mr. Perfect defeated Blue Blazer

› Dino Bravo defeated Ronnie Garvin

› Brain Busters defeated Strike Force

› Jake Roberts defeated Andre the Giant by DQ

› Hart Foundation defeated Honky Tonk Man and Greg Valentine

› Bad News Brown vs. Jim Duggan went to a no contest

› Red Rooster defeated Bobby Heenan



WRESTLEMANIA VI

WRESTLEMANIA VI
APRIL 1, 1990

Venue: SkyDome – Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Attendance: 67,678

WWE took its most prestigious event north of the border in 1990, when Canada's SkyDome hosted *WrestleMania VI*. Not only did the event mark the first time *WrestleMania* crossed borders, but it also featured the first Champion vs. Champion main event when Intercontinental Champion Ultimate Warrior battled WWE Champion Hulk Hogan in the historic "Ultimate Challenge."

WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP: MILLION DOLLAR CHAMPIONSHIP:

- Demolition defeated Colossal Connection (c)
- Ted DiBiase defeated Jake Roberts by count-out

TITLE VS. TITLE MATCH:

- Ultimate Warrior defeated Hulk Hogan to retain the Intercontinental Championship and win the WWE Championship



What was supposed to happen was a changing of the guard in that timeframe. And there was a changing of the guard to a certain extent: Ultimate Warrior was victorious, great. He was supposed to lead the company and the brand into the next century, but that didn't happen for maybe lots of reasons. But it was very symbolic of the beginning of the end of what would be a fulltime career for Hogan.

— Vince McMahon



OTHER MATCHES:

- The Model defeated Koko B. Ware
- Earthquake defeated Hercules
- Brutus Beefcake defeated Mr. Perfect
- Roddy Piper vs. Bad News Brown went to a no contest
- Hart Foundation defeated The Bolsheviks
- The Barbarian defeated Tito Santana
- Dusty Rhodes and Sapphire defeated Randy Savage and Sensational Sherri
- Orient Express defeated The Rockers by count-out
- Jim Duggan defeated Dino Bravo
- Big Boss Man defeated Akeem
- Rick Rude defeated Jimmy Snuka

WRESTLEMANIA VII

Venue: Sports Arena – Los Angeles, CA

Attendance: 16,158

Sports-entertainment has always drawn upon current events to create compelling circumstances. The events surrounding *WrestleMania VII* were no different. In the main event, Iraqi sympathizer Sgt. Slaughter was scheduled to defend his WWE Championship against Hulk Hogan at the outdoor Los Angeles Coliseum. But as the road to *WrestleMania* drew closer to its destination, the conflict in the Middle East began to heighten, and security around Slaughter and the entire event became a concern. With the safety of its Superstars and fans in mind, WWE chose to move *WrestleMania* indoors, marking one of the rare times that current events worked against WWE's original plans.

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

- Hulk Hogan defeated Sgt. Slaughter (c)



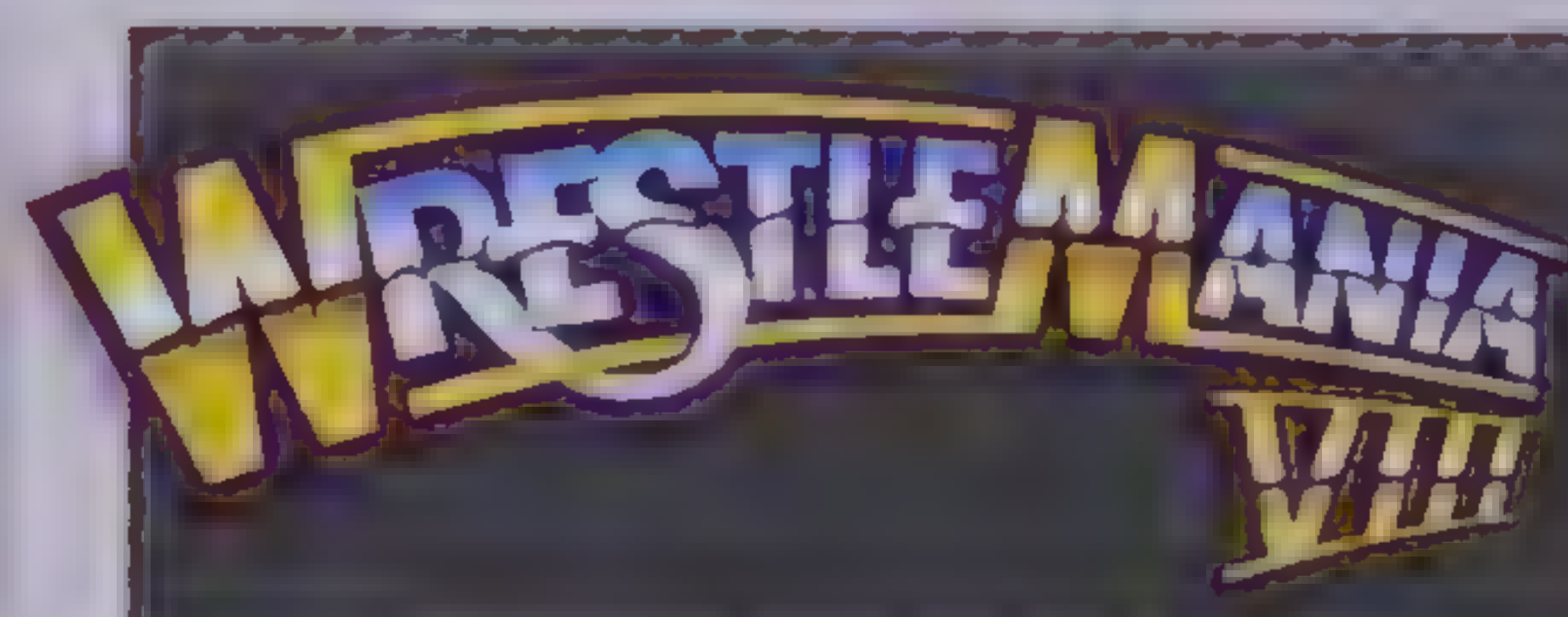
WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP:

- Nasty Boys defeated Hart Foundation (c)

BLINDFOLD MATCH:

- Jake Roberts defeated The Model

WRESTLEMANIA VII
MARCH 24, 1991



WRESTLEMANIA VIII
APRIL 5, 1992

RETIREMENT MATCH:

- › Ultimate Warrior defeated Randy Savage

INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP:

- › Big Boss Man defeated Mr. Perfect (c) by DQ

OTHER MATCHES:

- › The Rockers defeated Haku and The Barbarian
- › Texas Tornado defeated Dino Bravo
- › British Bulldog defeated Warlord
- › Undertaker defeated Jimmy Snuka
- › Genichiro Tenryu and Koji Kitao defeated Demolition
- › Earthquake defeated Greg Valentine
- › Legion of Doom defeated Power and Glory
- › Virgil defeated Ted DiBiase by count-out
- › The Mountie defeated Tito Santana

Venue: Hoosier Dome – Indianapolis, IN

Attendance: 62,167

When Ric Flair signed with WWE in 1991, fans across the globe grew euphoric over the idea of the elusive Hulk Hogan-Flair dream match finally taking place. Those fans' hopes were temporarily realized in February 1992, when it was announced that the two sports-entertainment icons would square off at *WrestleMania VIII*. As *WrestleMania* neared, however, it was explained to the fans that Hogan would be pulled from his match against Flair in favor of a battle with Sid Justice. Though the on-camera conflict between Hogan and Justice was intense, many still speculate about the reasoning behind the change.

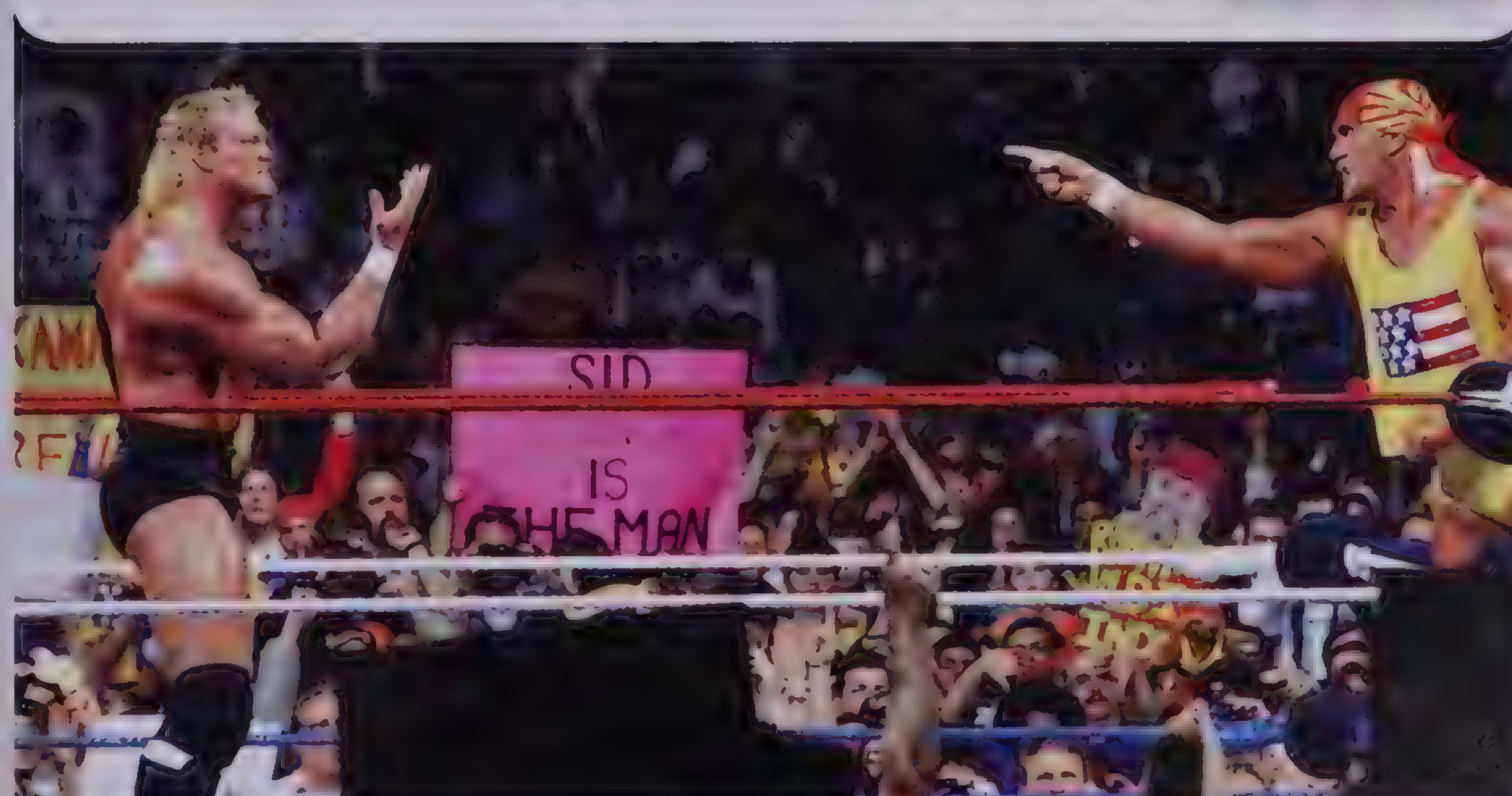
INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP: › Bret Hart defeated Roddy Piper (c)

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP: › Randy Savage defeated Ric Flair (c)

WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP: › Natural Disasters defeated Money Inc. (c) by count-out

This is strictly my opinion on why Flair-Hogan didn't take place: It was a creative difference; it was an ego difference; it was a professional difference. And I don't think Ric Flair was accepted into the WWE Universe like we all thought he would be. We thought it'd be a natural flow. Ric was a different style than Hogan, a different character than Hogan. And when he came to WWE, I think fans from the other organization kind of rebelled against him. I know there were several pre-WrestleMania matches with Hogan and Ric Flair, and none of them seemed to be the attraction we thought it was going to be. So I think there was a lot of creative thought put into it by Vince and the powers-that-be, and I think it really just came down to, 'I don't think this will be the quality match, and I don't think it will be the attraction everybody figured it would be.'

— Gerald Brisco



› Hulk Hogan defeated Sid Justice by DQ

OTHER MATCHES:

- › Shawn Michaels defeated El Matador
- › Undertaker defeated Jake Roberts
- › Jim Duggan, Sgt. Slaughter, Virgil, and Big Boss Man defeated The Mountie, Repo Man, and Nasty Boys
- › Tatanka defeated The Model
- › Owen Hart defeated Skinner

Ego being what it is, I was like. 'Wow, we have to go to the Los Angeles Coliseum. We have to sell it out.' That would have been the largest crowd ever; it could seat more than the Pontiac Silverdome. Then the war broke out and Sgt. Slaughter was a sympathizer of the other country, at the time. We felt it was not the right patriotic thing to do, in terms of going to the large venue and decided, 'Wait a minute, this is a little too close to reality here, so we better bring it back indoors and control it better: tone it down some.'

— Vince McMahon



THE NEW GENERATION

REINVENTING WWE

The nation's torrid attraction to WWE cooled off considerably in the early 1990s. Many chalk up its decline in popularity to the oftentimes cyclical nature of the sports-entertainment industry. And while this theory may have merit, it's also safe to say the public's perception of WWE was negatively impacted by the steroid allegations made by the federal government that nearly sent Vince McMahon to prison and brought the company to its knees.

Hoping to nail McMahon and the company because many wrestlers were engaged in the then legal practice of using steroids, the government began subpoenaing WWE in 1992. Once the subpoenas started coming in, a new one showed up every Friday like clockwork, which meant WWE had to search through every record, file, and piece of communication all over again. This process went on for two years.

"One of the subpoenas I'll never forget," recalls Linda McMahon. "They wanted any piece of correspondence that included the words 'family entertainment.' They were trying to prove that we were some sort of fraud on the viewing audience by having family entertainment with all these guys that were jacked up on steroids. It was just awful. And we were facing it in two ways: Vince was personally charged, as well as the company. So it wasn't just his personal liberty that was at stake, but the government also sought huge fines and the forfeiture of corporate headquarters and shut downs of the business. It was a very daunting time."

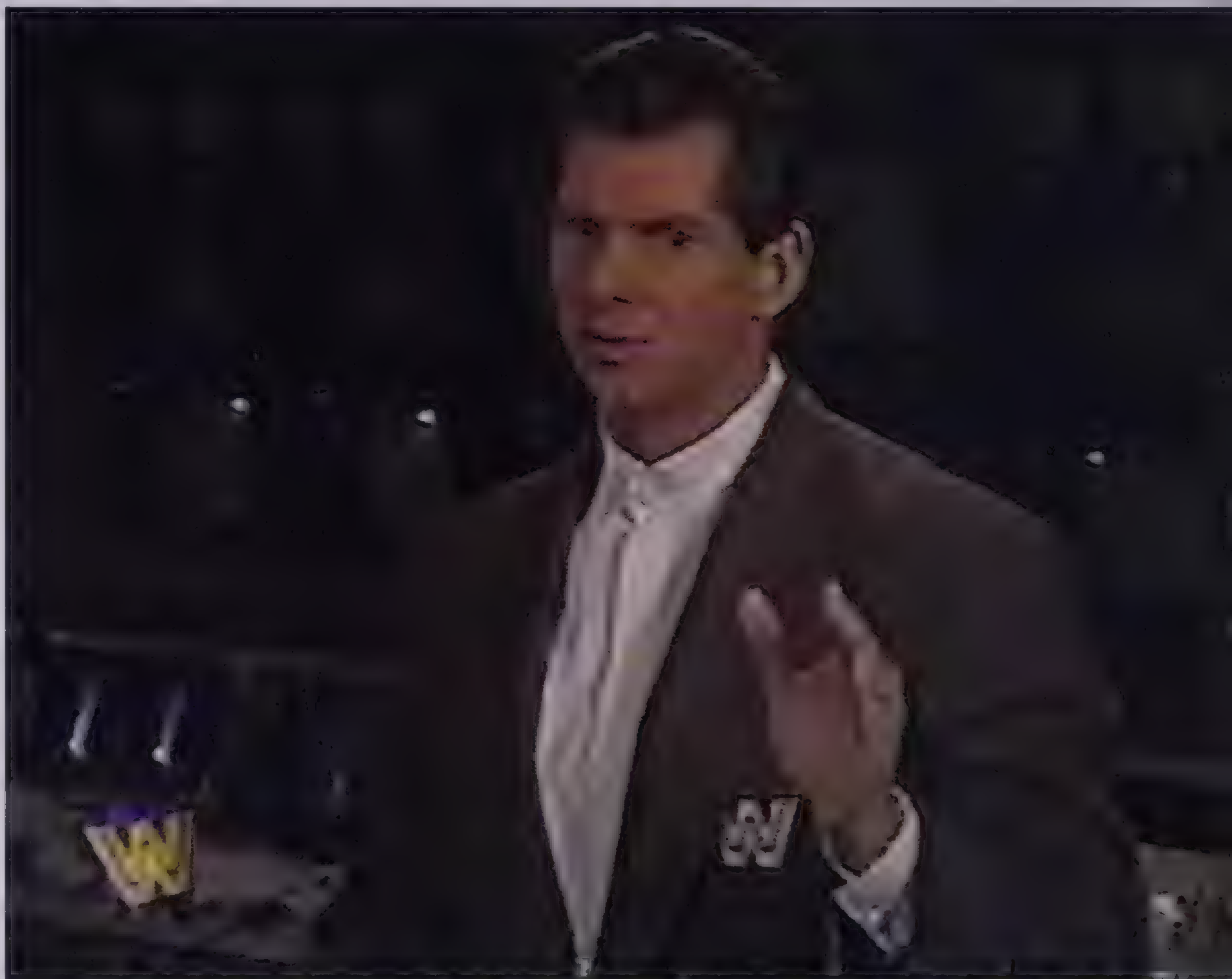
After years of chasing, the government efforts were all designed to coerce McMahon and the company into a plea bargain. By accepting, he'd assuredly sidestep any jail time and would be able to move on with his personal and professional life. To do so, he simply needed to admit guilt.

EE They were doing everything they could to break me down so eventually I'd plea. But that's not what happened. I just can't live with myself by doing that. I have principles, as strange as that may be to anybody else. But I couldn't do that; I couldn't say I was guilty of something that I wasn't. *33*

— Vince McMahon



Unable to break McMahon, the government finally indicted him and his company on a variety of steroid-related charges, including a trumped up charge of conspiring to defraud the Food and Drug Administration in its attempts to regulate the manufacture and distribution of steroids in November 1993. If convicted, McMahon faced a lengthy prison sentence and multimillion dollar fines, as well as fines for the company. A felony conviction would have resulted in McMahon losing his promoters' license as well.



McMahon makes an unprecedented direct address to fans concerning the allegations in the press

Vince and Linda McMahon, Hulk Hogan, and the Ultimate Warrior at the trial



With the trial set for July 1994, McMahon sat his family down to discuss the tough road ahead. Among the many difficulties they were facing, explained McMahon, was the slandering of his name in the media, which happened as expected. In fact, Phil Mushnick of the *New York Post* went so far as to claim “Never will you encounter a human being more cold-blooded, more devoid of humor and propriety than Vince McMahon” and “Hannibal Lecter is the only fictional character who comes close.” But even worse than the character assassination being played out in the media was the idea that if convicted, McMahon believed he would never see his family again.

“It was a scary time,” admits Linda. “Vince said, ‘If I go to prison, I’ll never come out alive. They’ll kill me when I’m in there.’ He believed someone would’ve arranged it or they would’ve put him in a compromising situation that he never would’ve stood for. So he believed he would never come out of there alive.”

Luckily for McMahon, a jury of his peers failed to find any credibility in the prosecution’s case and on July 22, deemed the WWE head not guilty of the only charge that eventually went to the jury, namely, conspiring to defraud the Food & Drug Administration. The verdict effectively put an end to the longest two years of McMahon’s life, and allowed him to finally redirect his undivided attention back to WWE, which had been suffering financially during the steroid investigation and trial.

“After the verdict, we went away to Florida for about a week. While away, Vince and I both experienced the same phenomenon; we couldn’t stop trying to catch our breath. We had all this built up stress.”

— Linda McMahon



“It was a very difficult time for us financially. The amount of money it took to defend your freedom was extraordinary because you’re competing with the United States government; they have an endless supply of money and resources and you don’t. So it was draining and I wasn’t able to spend as much time on the creativity and things of that nature. And the business suffered. You just can’t do both. You can’t defend your liberty with the amount of time and energy it takes to do that and at the same time keep the product up at a high level. It was okay, but we began to lose money.”

— Vince McMahon



The financial stress of the trial hit WWE almost immediately, which forced the company to make drastic cutbacks in all areas of the business. Eventually, entire floors of the four-story headquarters were left barren. The security guards patrolling the perimeter of the building were relieved. Coffee services were ceased. There was even a company-wide memo that went out encouraging all employees to bring their own pens and pencils. And despite all the cutbacks, the company still reported a net loss of \$4.4 million in 1995, marking the first time WWE ever finished a year in the red.

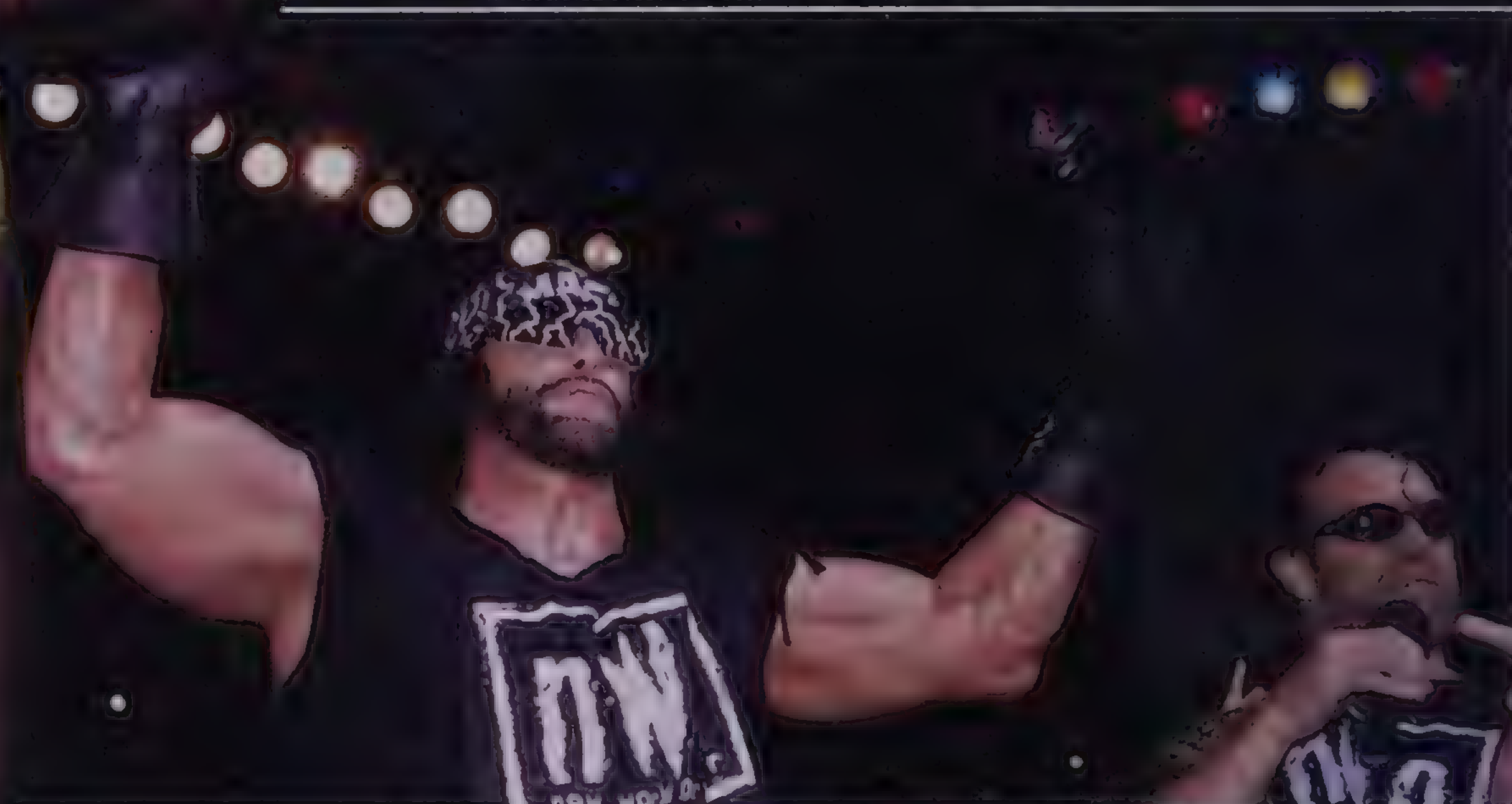


Watching from his perch in Atlanta, Ted Turner saw McMahon's struggles as the perfect opportunity for his World Championship Wrestling to swoop in and acquire many of WWE's top names, starting with Hulk Hogan.

"Hulk started to attract all the talent down to WCW, saying, 'Look, Vince is going under. He's going bankrupt; you better get out of there now,'" says Linda. And sure enough, shortly after Hogan signed with WCW, several other popular names who achieved great success with WWE in the 1980s also signed with Turner, including Randy Savage, Gene Okerlund, and Bobby Heenan.



Gene Okerlund interviewing Ric Flair



WCW's Randy Savage with nWo member Scott Hall

Ted opened his checkbook and bought just about everybody you could buy in terms of our top talent. They almost all went there with the exception of one gentleman by the name of the Undertaker...and later on, Triple H.

—Vince McMahon



With many of its Superstars running for the door, WWE was forced to reinvent itself. No longer could it rely on proven, yet aging Superstars. Instead, they had to look elsewhere.

"We realized that while their roster was old in athletic years, we needed to get young," says Jim Ross, Head of Talent Relations. "We needed to create some room at the top to get some new faces. It was a direction by Vince to the whole company that we're going to make new stars. The theme was the New Generation, and the idea was to get younger."



Hulk Hogan was more of a cartoon character from a wrestling standpoint. He was such a phenomenon that, by the time Hulkamania had played out, I found myself as the champion. That's when the business took a sharp turn. It stopped being about cartoon characters and it became more about the actual wrestling.

—Bret Hart

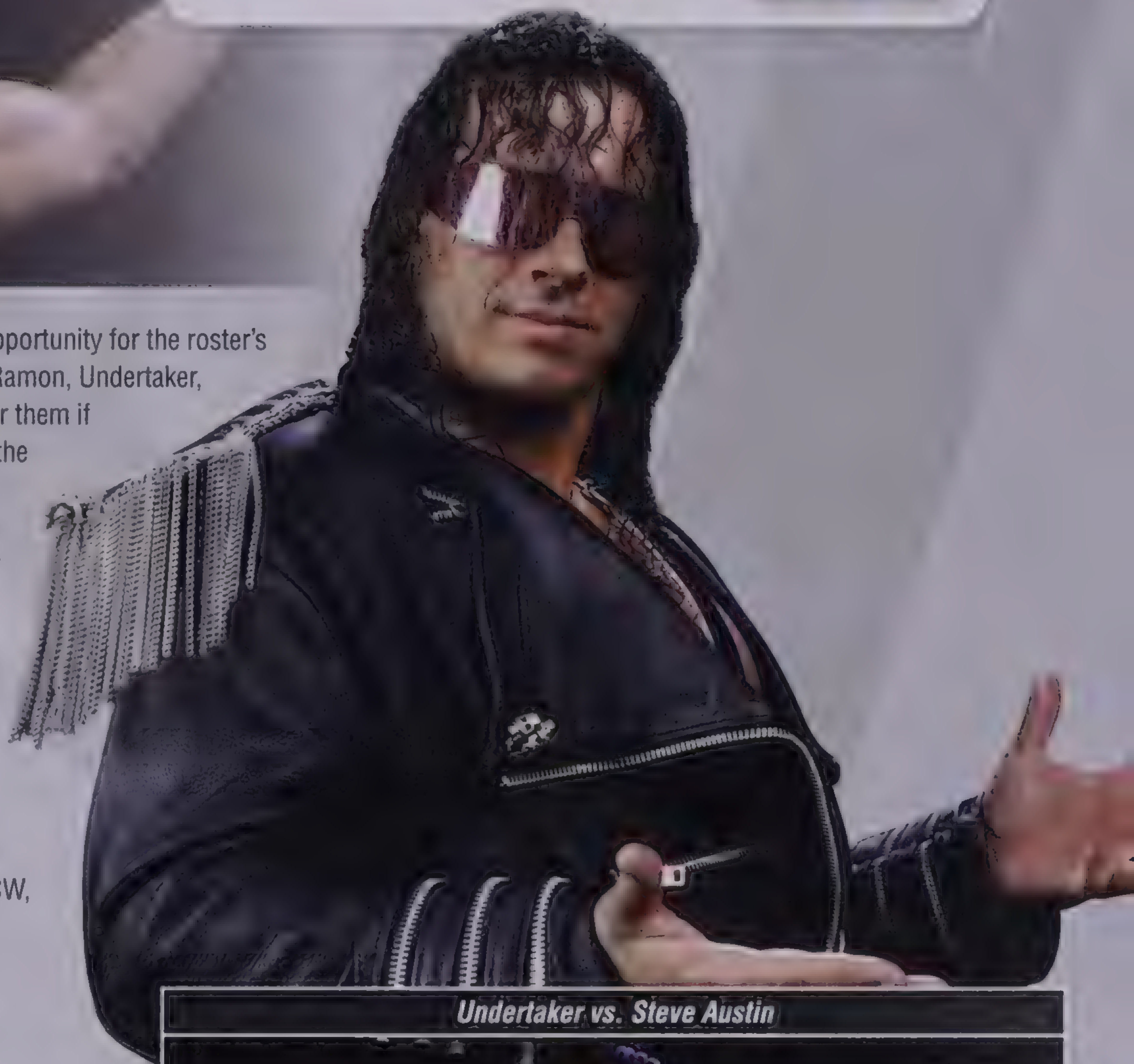


WWE's change in philosophy ushered in a period of enormous opportunity for the roster's younger Superstars. Names like Shawn Michaels, Diesel, Razor Ramon, Undertaker, and 1-2-3 Kid all earned breaks that might not have been there for them if Hogan were still around. Bret Hart, who had forced his way into the main event picture a few years prior, became the poster boy for the New Generation's earliest years. With Hart, not only did WWE have a younger, fresher Superstar, but they also had a competitor who valued in-ring ability over the theatrics oftentimes used by his predecessors.

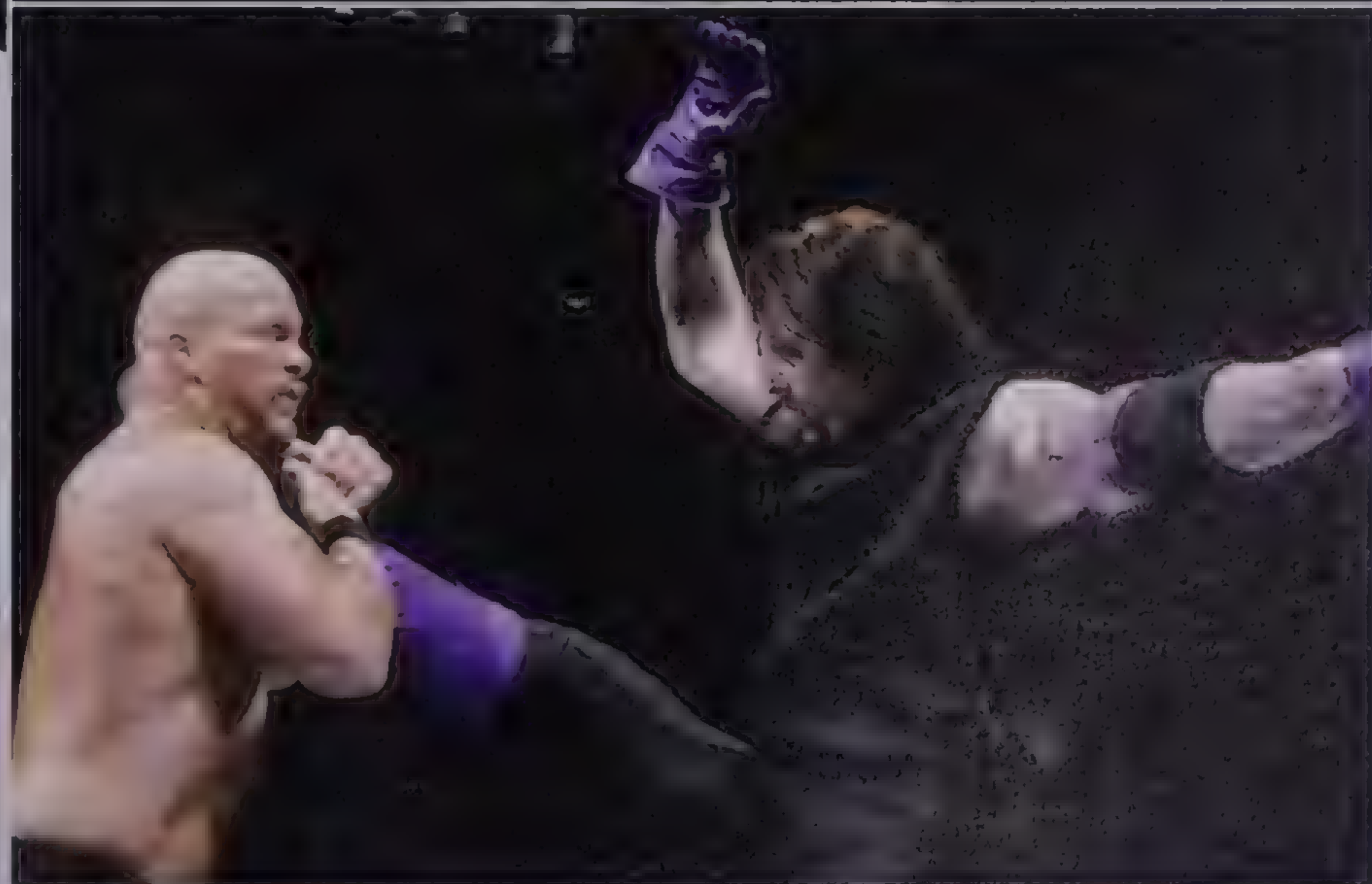
While the New Generation of WWE Superstars adjusted to the more athletic in-ring style, McMahon was also busy evolving the business behind the scenes. In the years leading up to the New Generation, the sports-entertainment industry was dominated by egotistical Superstars who typically did whatever they wanted. But as those characters aged out or jumped to WCW, WWE began to implement a more civilized approach to doing business, which held Superstars accountable for their actions and required a strong line of communication between in-ring competitors and corporate executives.

"There was such an attitude in the business years ago," recalls Pat Patterson. "Guys would always complain about what they were asked to do or whine about their pay. Vince stopped all that, but it wasn't easy. It took a while for the boys to adjust. They didn't like office people coming to the shows telling them what to do. 'Screw you, I'm not doing that,' they'd say. Vince had to show them that this was the new way of doing business. The ones that didn't play along got fired. A small handful of guys got away with it, like Shawn Michaels. He was a little prick. I hated him. But me hating him didn't impact me enjoying his work."

"Eventually, a few of the top guys realized that Vince was doing what was best for the business, so they adapted. Once the top guys learned, everybody else followed. Vince had to go through a lot of crap to get there, but he eventually did. And as a result, WWE became profitable again."



Undertaker vs. Steve Austin



SUPERSTARS OF THE NEW GENERATION

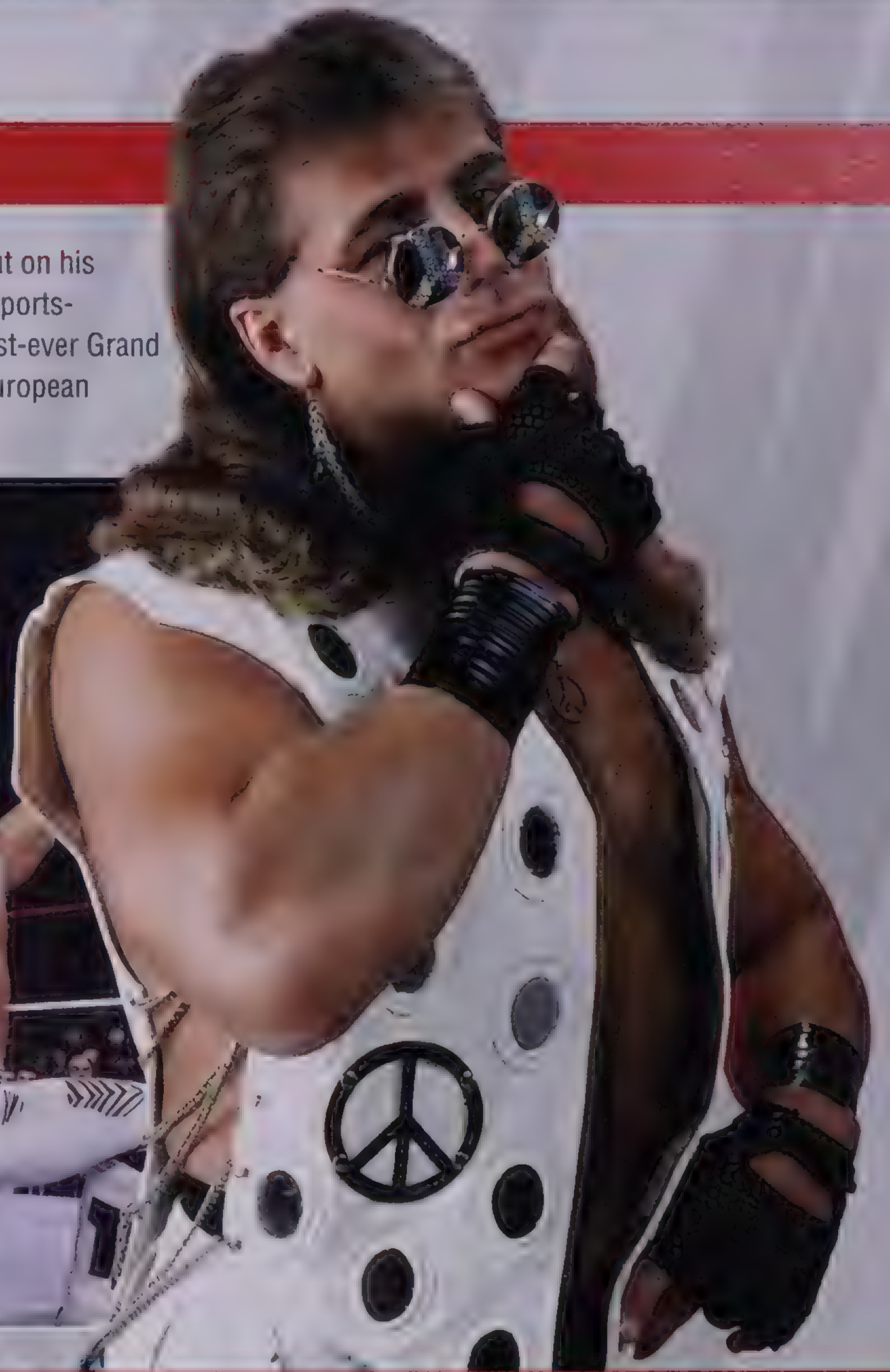
BRET HART

A second-generation Superstar, Bret Hart's superior in-ring skills helped earn him the moniker "The Excellence of Execution." Over the course of his illustrious WWE career, the "Hit Man" captured the Intercontinental, United States, World Tag Team, and WWE Championship en route to enshrinement in the WWE Hall of Fame.



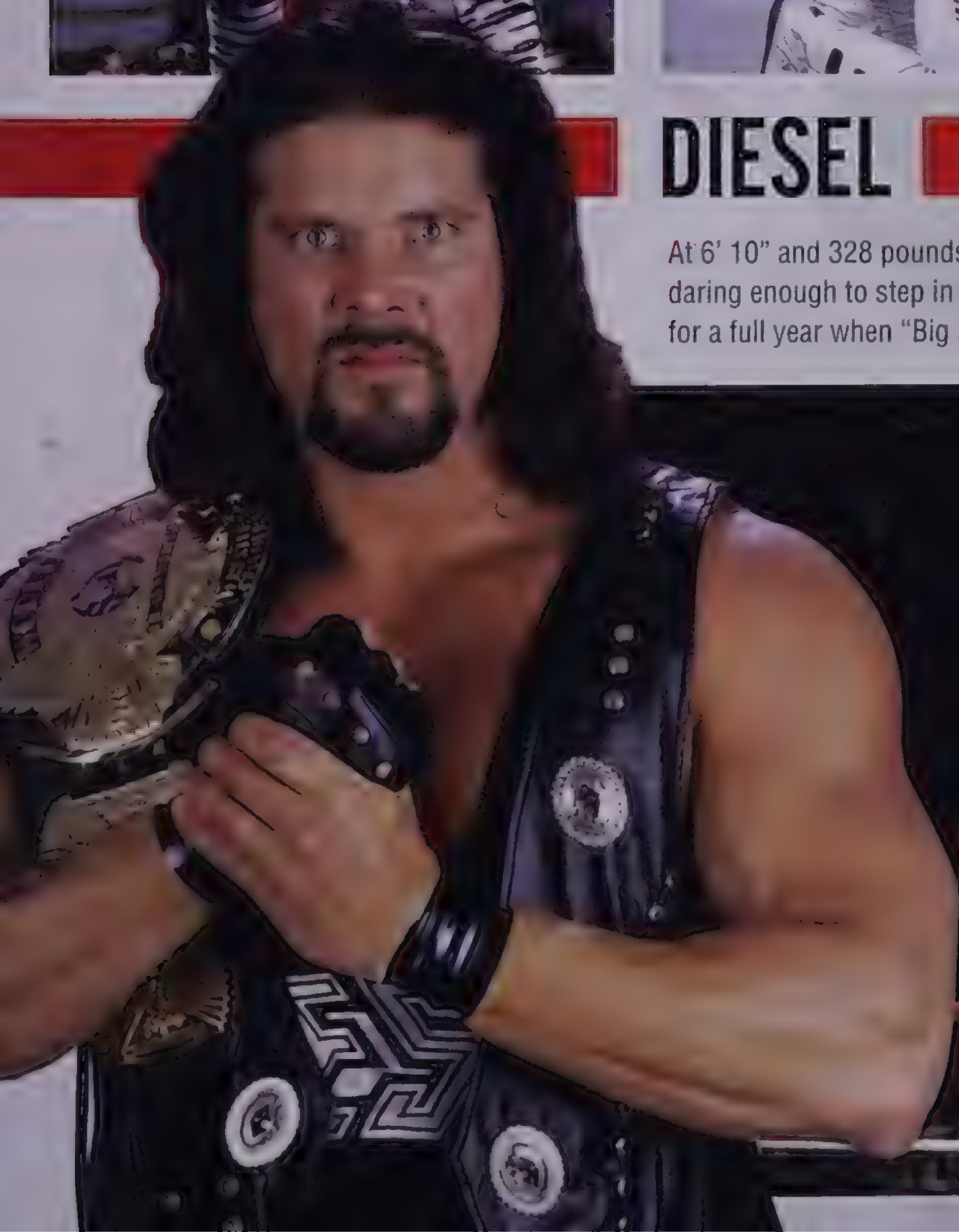
SHAWN MICHAELS

Originally a tag-team specialist with partner Marty Jannetty, Shawn Michaels broke out on his own in 1992 and subsequently went on to become one of the greatest Superstars in sports-entertainment history. The "Heartbreak Kid" will forever be remembered as WWE's first-ever Grand Slam Champion, meaning he held the WWE, Intercontinental, World Tag Team, and European Championships at different points in his career.



DIESEL

At 6' 10" and 328 pounds, the massive Diesel regularly ran over any New Generation Superstar daring enough to step in the ring with him. Starting in November 1994, WWE ran on Diesel power for a full year when "Big Daddy Cool" defeated Bob Backlund for the WWE Championship.



RAZOR RAMON

Sporting gold chains and his signature toothpick, the mere presence of Razor Ramon was enough to infuriate an opponent. And once the bell rang, his excellent in-ring skills were enough to catapult him to four Intercontinental Championship reigns.



LEX LUGER

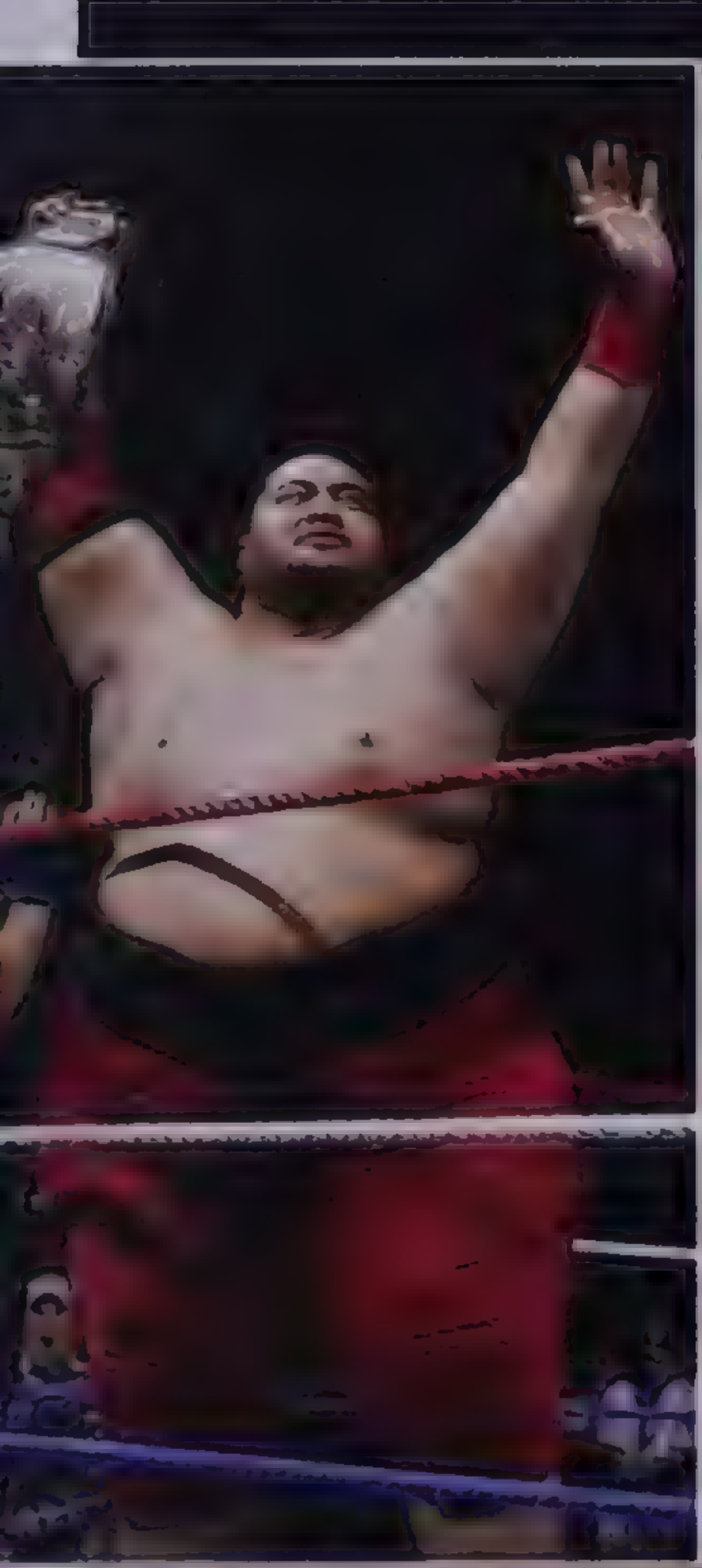


When Hulk Hogan left WWE following the 1993 *King of the Ring* tournament, fans everywhere felt the void of a patriotic Superstar they could get behind. Enter Lex Luger. After bodyslamming Yokozuna on the deck of the USS Intrepid, Luger became WWE's American hero until his departure following *SummerSlam* 1995.



YOKOZUNA

Billed as a 6' 4", 600 pound sumo wrestler from Japan, the mighty Yokozuna was nearly impossible to defeat. A two-time WWE Champion, the WWE Hall of Famer earned victories over the industry's biggest names, including Hulk Hogan, Bret Hart, and Undertaker.



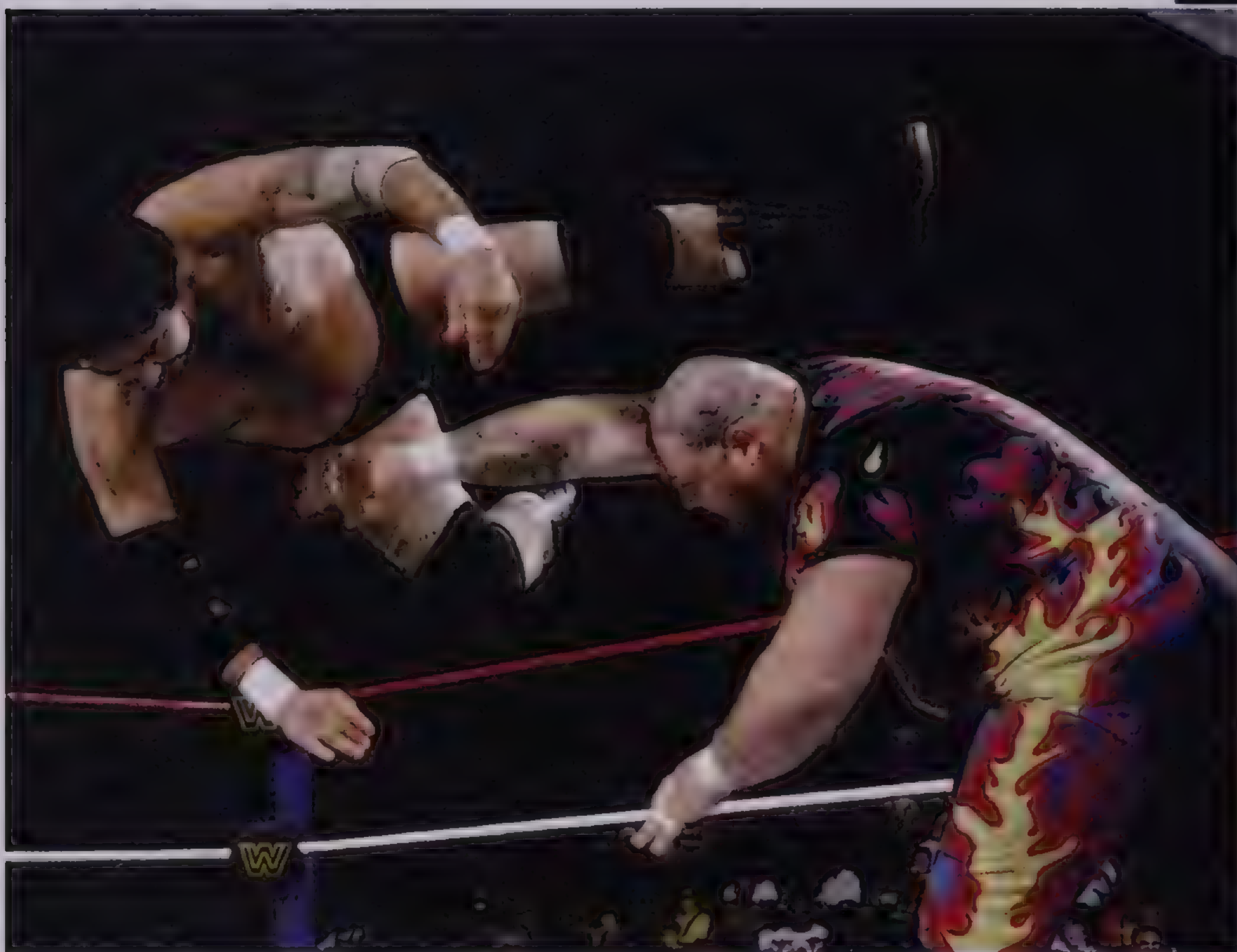
UNDERTAKER

Today, Undertaker is recognized as one of the most iconic Superstars to ever grace a WWE ring, thanks in large part to the damage he dished out during the New Generation. Yokozuna, King Kong Bundy, King Mabel, Diesel, and a whole host of others tried to put an end to The Deadman, but none were able to succeed.



BAM BAM BIGELOW

With nearly 400 pounds tacked to his enormous frame, Bam Bam Bigelow charged at opponents like a true super heavyweight. But unlike most men his size, the fiery “Beast from the East” could also bounce around the ring like a cruiserweight, making him one of the most dangerous Superstars of the New Generation.



GOLDUST



Despite debuting during the New Generation, Goldust had a propensity to push the envelope in a manner much like Superstars of the Attitude Era. Covered in gold face paint and wearing a flowing blond wig, The Bizarre One had an uncanny way of making his opponents question his motives in the ring.



1-2-3 KID



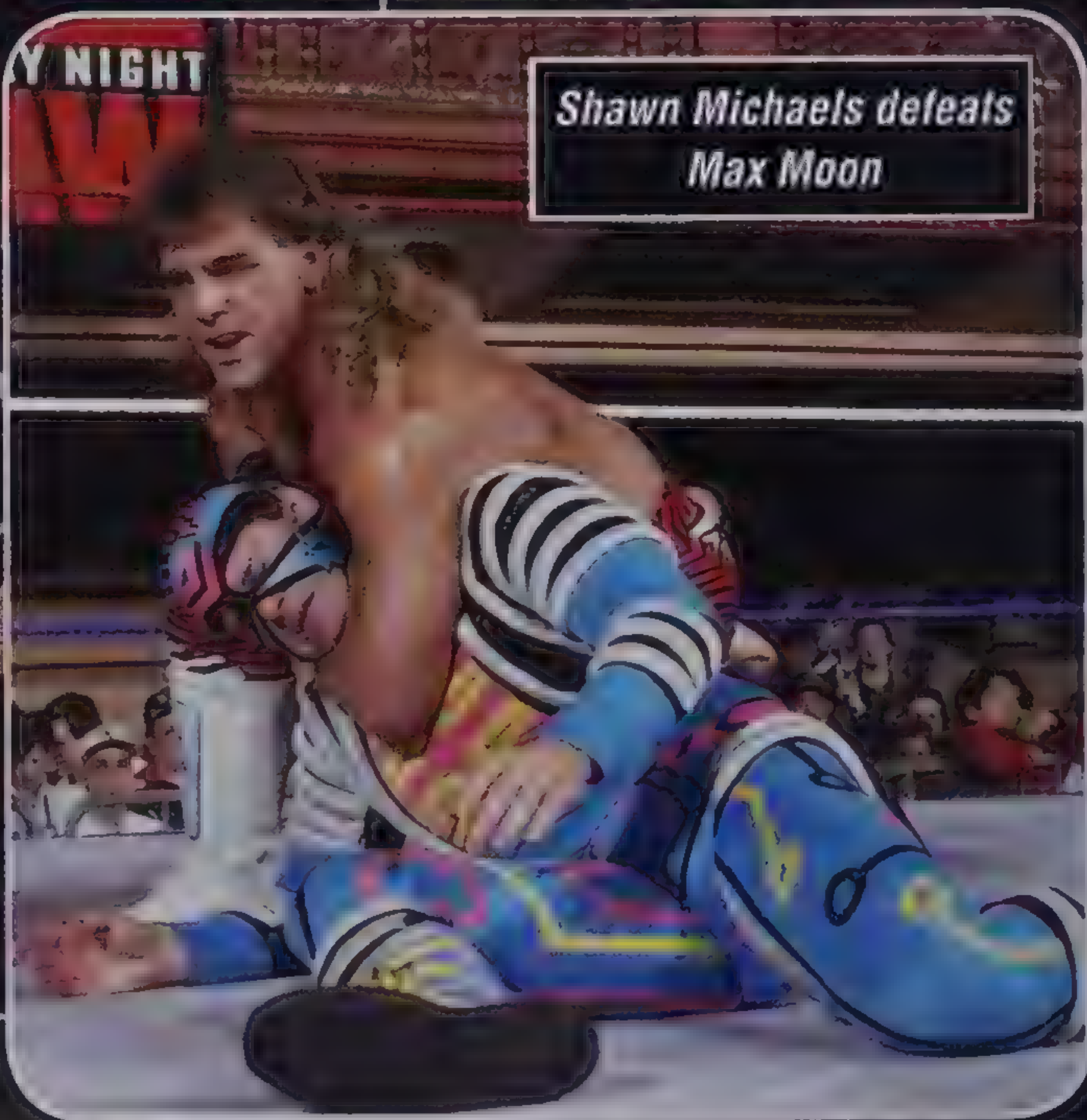
Following an upset victory over Razor Ramon in May 1993, the 1-2-3 Kid quickly became every fan's favorite underdog. Over the next three years, his lightning-fast offense carried him to victories over the likes of Adam Bomb, Hakushi, and Jeff Jarrett.



DOINK

Originally an evil prankster who preyed on people's fear of clowns, Doink eventually saw the light, transforming himself into the fun-loving Superstar he is better known as today.



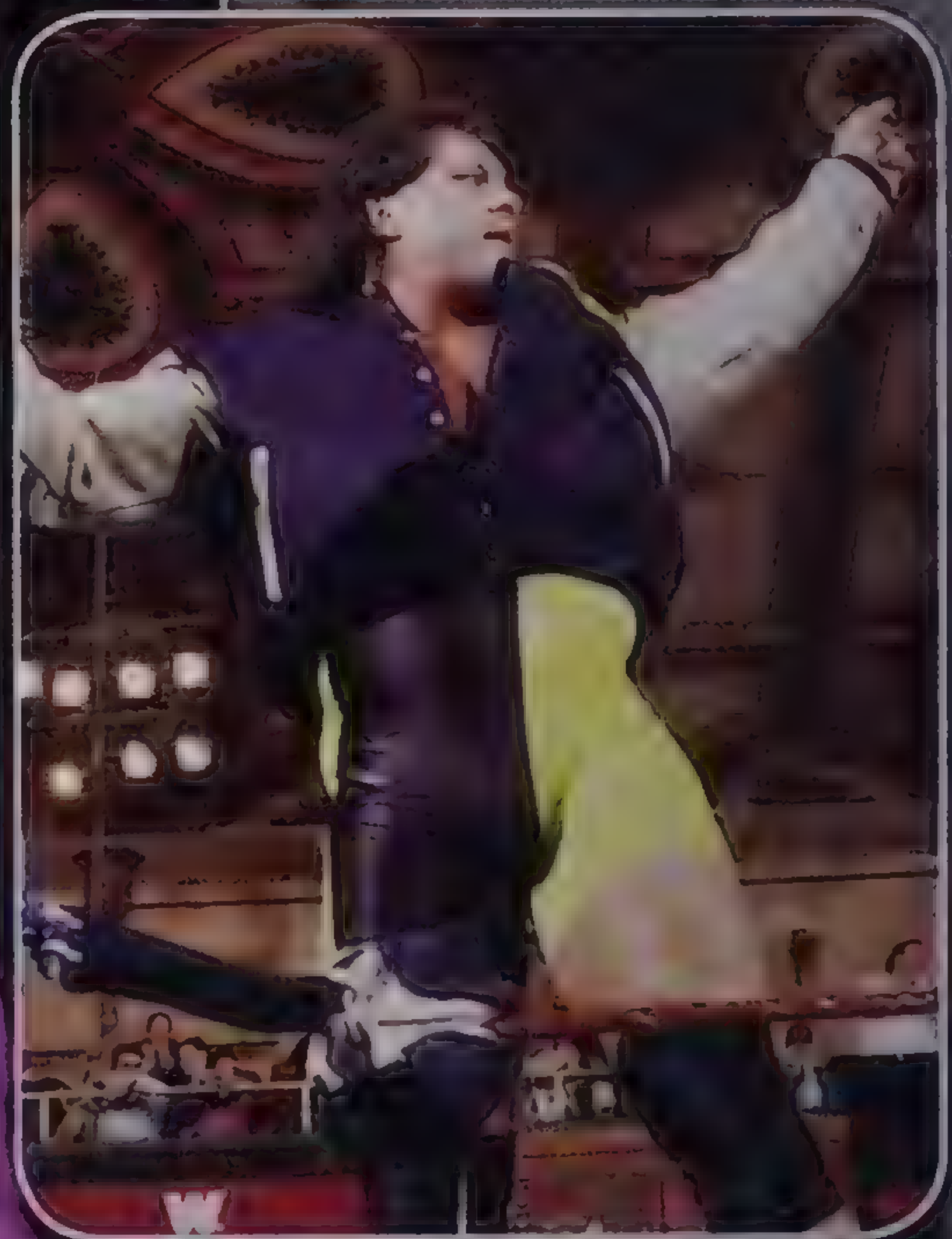


*Shawn Michaels defeats
Max Moon*

RAW[®]



*Bobby Heenan tries to sneak in
to the first Monday Night Raw
show dressed as a woman*



Following the success of *All-American Wrestling* and *Tuesday Night Titans*, the USA Network expanded its WWE offering to include *Prime Time Wrestling* in January 1985. A weekly two-hour program hosted by Gorilla Monsoon and Bobby "The Brain" Heenan, *Prime Time Wrestling* largely featured matches replayed from WWE's other nationally-syndicated shows. In between each match, Monsoon and Heenan would offer commentary and witty quips about the Superstars featured in each segment.

The *Prime Time Wrestling* formula worked well through the remainder of the decade. But as the 1990s came along, it was clear that the show needed a facelift. Over the next few years, *Prime Time Wrestling* went through a series of subtle format changes. And while the modifications in production helped the show remain relevant, its overall success was not up to WWE's elite standards.

"We needed a change; we reached a plateau," recalls Vince McMahon. "So then the idea came to produce literally a 'raw' show from the confines of an arena. We actually had to go back to our roots and produce television in this really gritty manner. It was an evolutionary concept and we are always doing that within our company; we are always changing with the times and that's why *Raw* was invented."



DID YOU KNOW?

The Grand Ballroom is located on the seventh floor of the Manhattan Center.

Monday Night Raw made its historic debut on January 11, 1993. Billed as "uncut, uncooked, and uncensored," the weekly one-hour telecast was unlike any WWE program of its time. Intentionally omitted from the production was the glitz and glamour typically found in WWE shows. In their place, WWE's larger-than-life characters were strategically placed into the small setting of the famed Manhattan Center's Grand Ballroom in New York City.

EE I remember bringing the ring up through a 4-by-6 foot elevator. We had to put every part individually up into that elevator. It was the only way we could get it in.

— WWE referee Mike Chioda



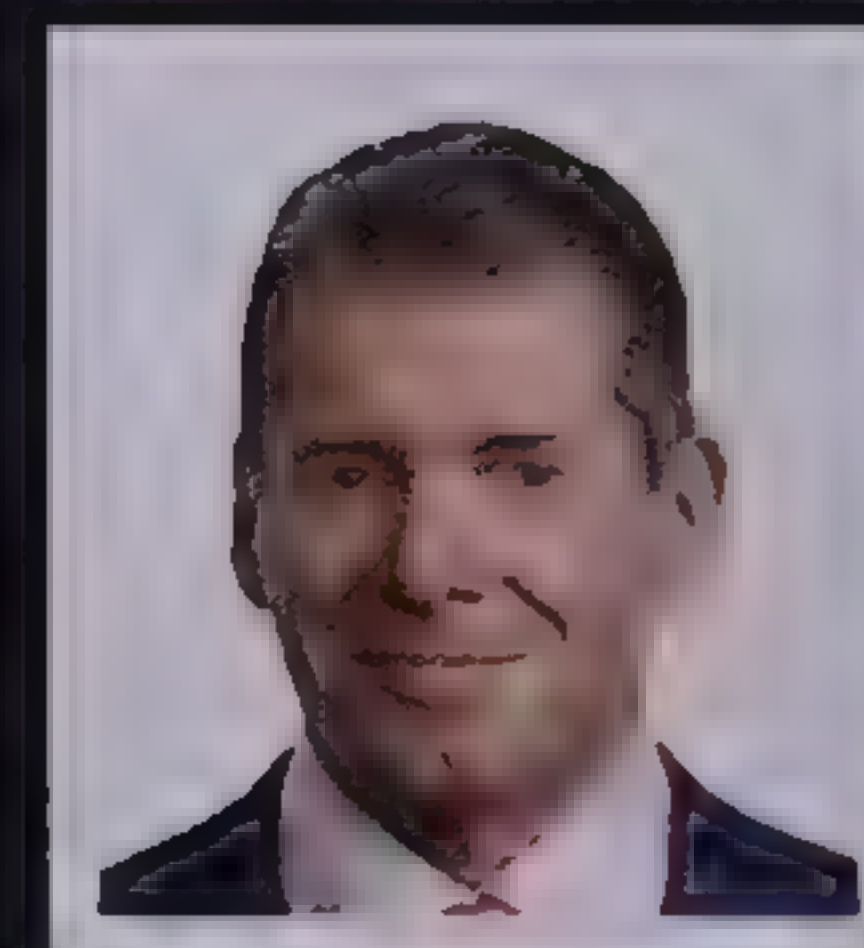
"We wanted a location somewhere in New York City," says McMahon. "To a certain extent, New York City is the heartbeat of a lot of entertainment. And in our business, Madison Square Garden has always been the mecca. Why not get close to the Garden? The Manhattan Center's right down the street."

At just 94-by-98 feet, the Manhattan Center's Grand Ballroom gave the live audience an intimacy with WWE's product they had never before experienced. Likewise, the fans watching on the USA Network were also treated to a first; never before had live WWE action been presented regularly on free television. Up until then, the only way to see WWE Superstars competing live was by buying a ticket or ordering a pay-per-view.



“ I guess maybe I did have some concern about being live. That's when I developed a philosophy, sort of a defensive one I guess, that 'nothing can go wrong if it's live.' **”**

—Vince McMahon



Like pay-per-view, *Monday Night Raw* featured competitive matches between well-known Superstars, which was yet another evolutionary tactic employed by WWE. Most televised matches prior to 1993 involved a well-established WWE Superstar making short work of a relatively unknown local competitor. Setting the tone early, the first-ever *Raw* match pitted two future

Hall of Famers, Yokozuna and Koko B. Ware, up against each other. In the end, the sumo champion defeated "The Birdman" after landing his devastating Banzai Drop. Elsewhere on the show, Shawn Michaels, who had yet to establish Sweet Chin Music as his signature move, used a suplex to defeat Max Moon and retain his Intercontinental Championship. Also, the Steiner Brothers topped the Executioners, and Undertaker defeated Damian Demento in the first-ever *Monday Night Raw* main event.

“ Looking back at it, I'm very proud to be the first. But at the time, I just wanted to get through it. You're trying not to think of the millions of people that were watching. **”**

—Announcer Sean Mooney, the first WWE personality to appear on *Monday Night Raw*



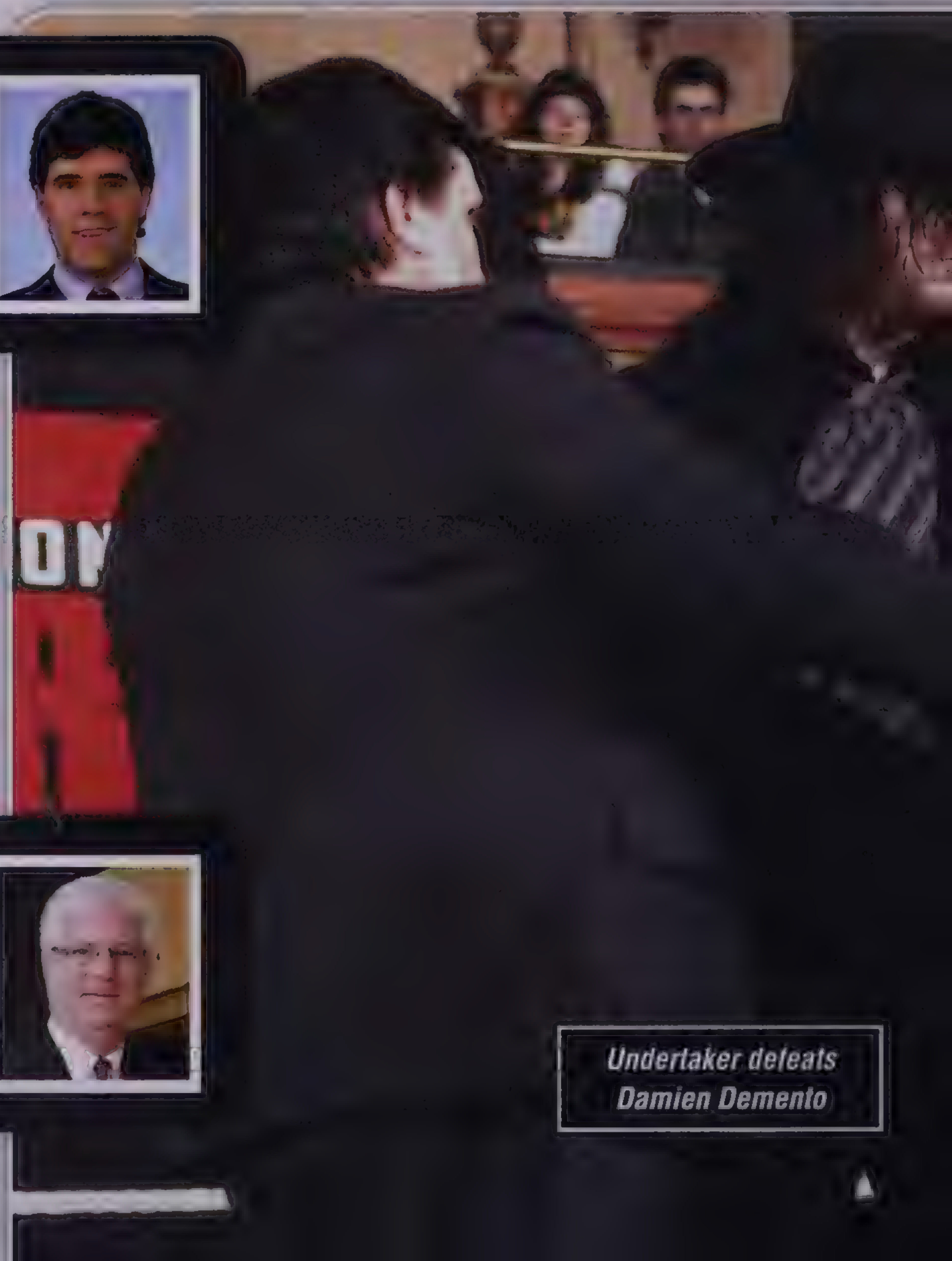
By night's end, it had become clear that WWE had created a must-see show and that the face of televised sports-entertainment would never be the same. No longer would WWE use syndicated television as its primary driver of domestic programming. Instead, its new live offering on the USA Network quickly grew to become the company's flagship program. Over the following few months, WWE solidified *Raw*'s positioning by offering more high-profile matches than had ever before been available on free television. These included Mr. Perfect versus Ric Flair, Razor Ramon versus 1-2-3 Kid, and Marty Jannetty versus Shawn Michaels—voted the 1993 Match of the Year by readers of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* magazine.

“ We were looking at all kinds of names and positioning. Vince said it needed to be gritty and right in your face. Then [former vice president of business operations] Dick Glover just blurted out *Uncooked Raw*. **”**

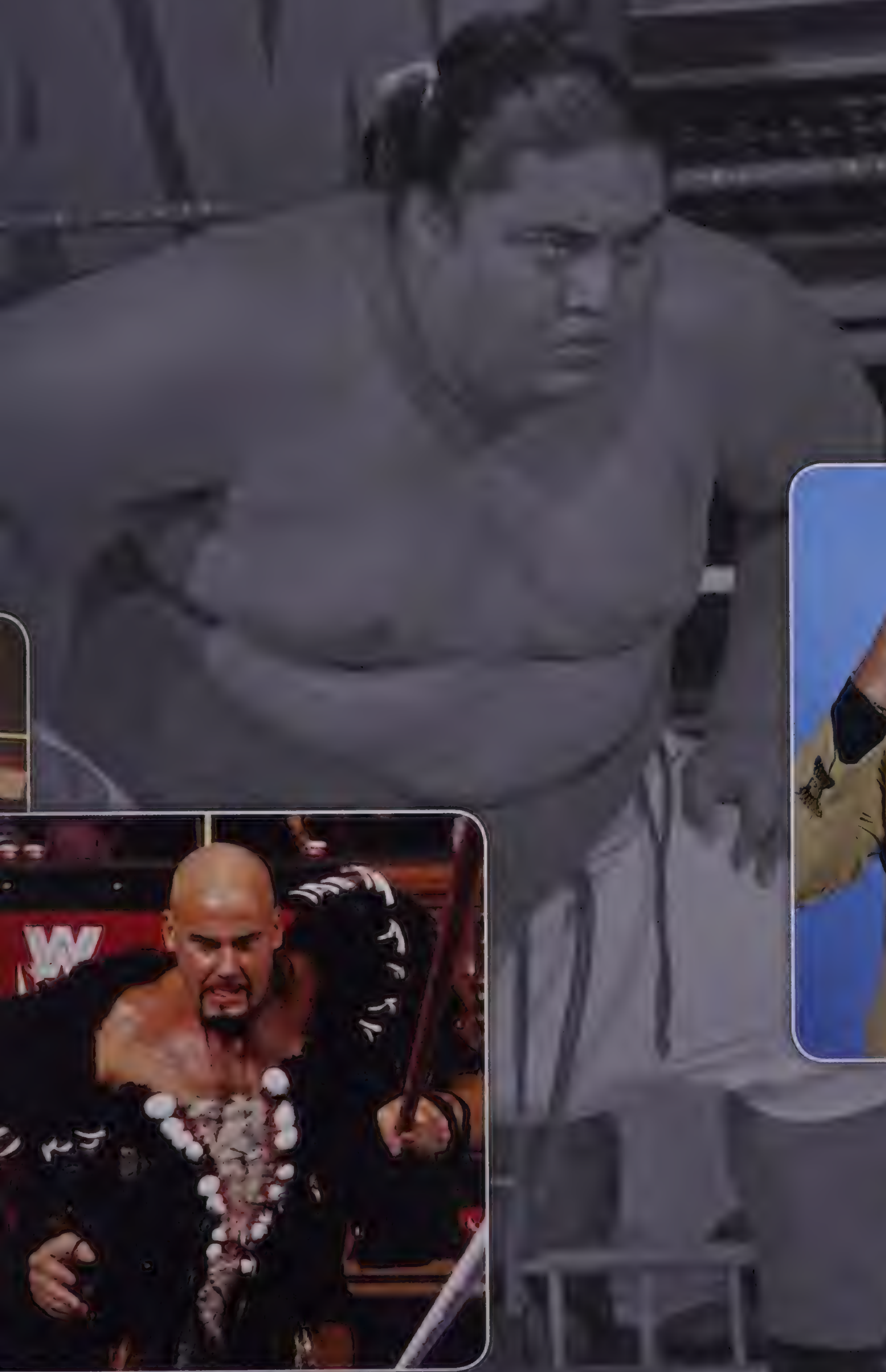
—Basil DeVito



Undertaker defeats
Damian Demento



*Yokozuna defeats
Koko B. Ware*



The Manhattan Center played host to the first eight episodes of *Monday Night Raw*. But with each passing show, it was becoming more evident that *Raw*'s expanding popularity would eventually force WWE to take the show to bigger arenas across the country. The first venue to host *Raw* outside of the Manhattan Center was the Mid-Hudson Civic Center in Poughkeepsie, New York. With a capacity of approximately 3,000 seats, the Civic Center accommodated three times more fans than the Manhattan Center, while also maintaining the show's signature intimate atmosphere.

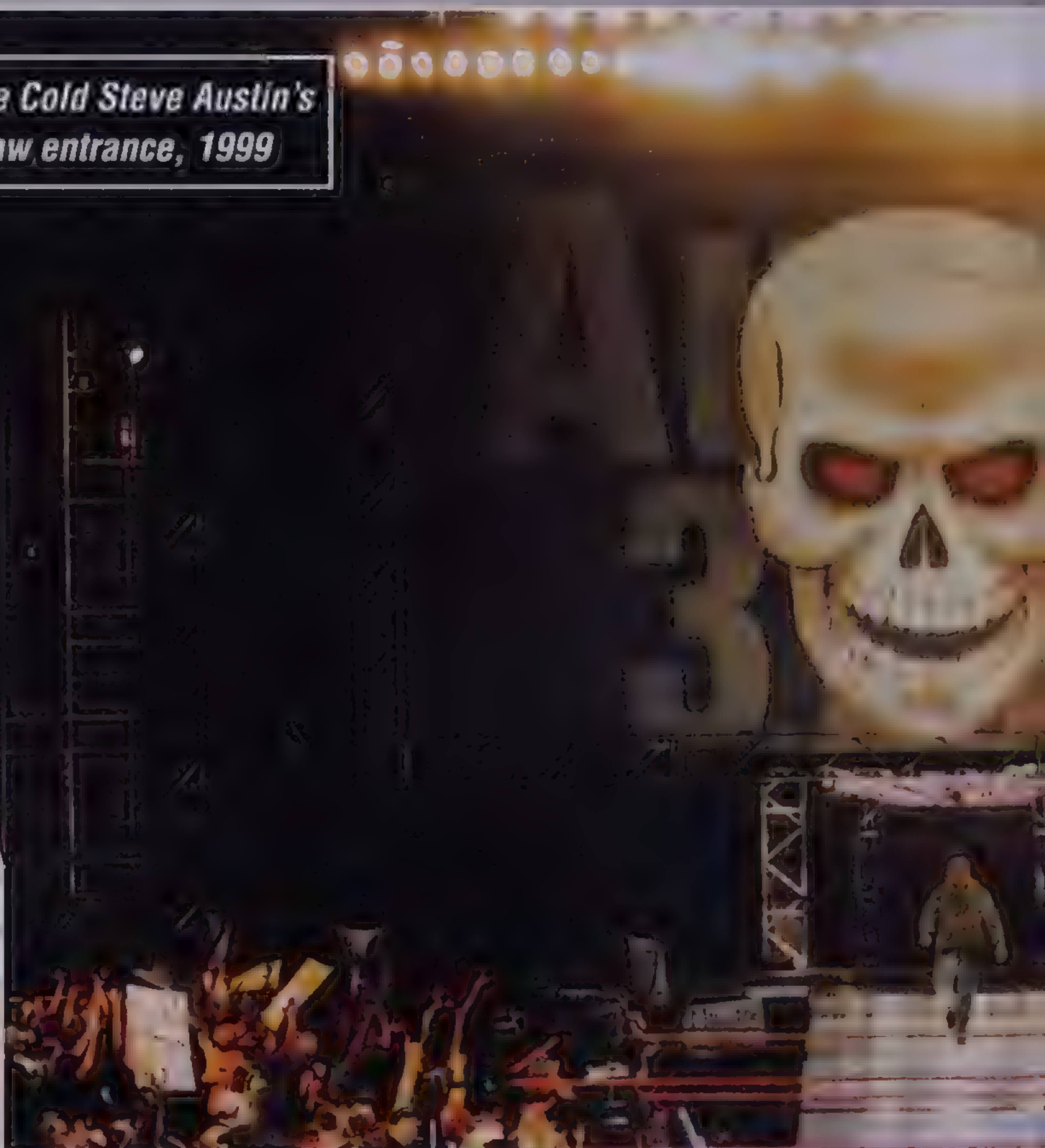
POINT OF INTEREST:

John Cena was a freshman in high school when *Monday Night Raw* debuted.

By year's end, the demand for *Raw* became so great that WWE had no choice but to abandon the idea of holding the show exclusively in small venues. And in September 1993, *Raw* entertained nearly 12,000 fans inside Connecticut's since-demolished New Haven Coliseum. And more than twenty years later, some of the world's biggest and best arenas have hosted *Raw*, including the SkyDome in Toronto, Canada, and the legendary Madison Square Garden in New York City.

Today, *Monday Night Raw* is among the most-watched regularly scheduled programs on primetime cable television and plays a major role in propelling USA to the top of all cable networks. Along the way, *Raw* has also earned the distinction of being the longest running weekly episodic program in television history, surpassing such iconic shows as *Gunsmoke*, *Lassie*, and *The Simpsons*.

Stone Cold Steve Austin's
Raw entrance, 1999



Marty Jannetty defeats Shawn Michaels to win the Intercontinental Championship on *Raw* on May 17, 1993.

FIRST RAW ANNOUNCE TEAM:

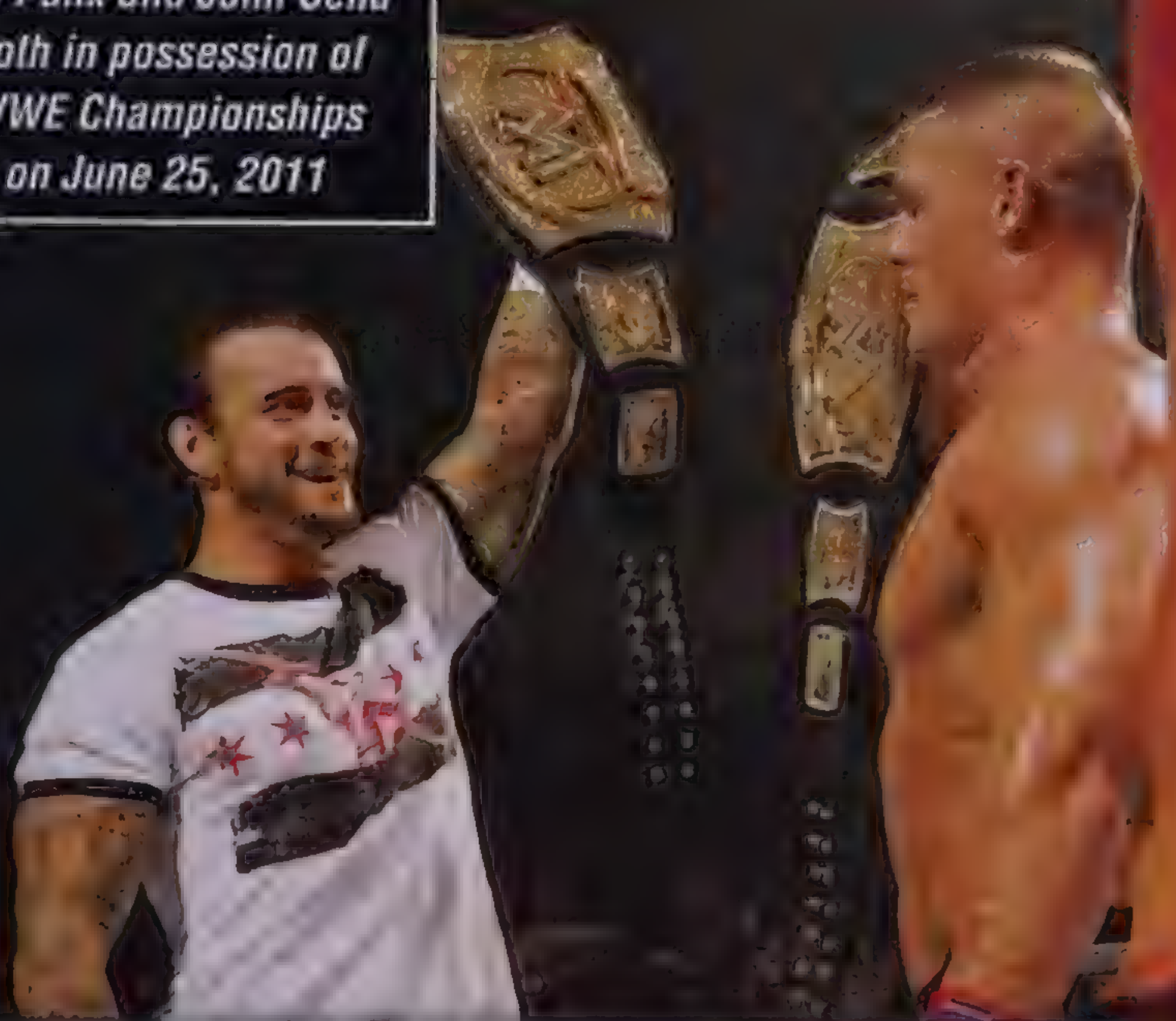
Monday Night Raw's first announce team consisted of Vince McMahon, Randy "Macho Man" Savage, and comedian Rob Bartlett. Bartlett only lasted a few months before eventually being replaced by Bobby Heenan.



Vince McMahon defeats Ric Flair to retain 100% Ownership of WWE on June 10, 2002



*CM Punk and John Cena
both in possession of
WWE Championships
on June 25, 2011*



*Chris Jericho debuts
on Raw on
August 9, 1999*



*John Cena debuts on Raw
on June 6, 2005*

WRESTLEMANIA

IX-XV



Venue: Caesars Palace – Las Vegas, NV

Attendance: 16,891

WRESTLEMANIA IX

APRIL 4, 1993

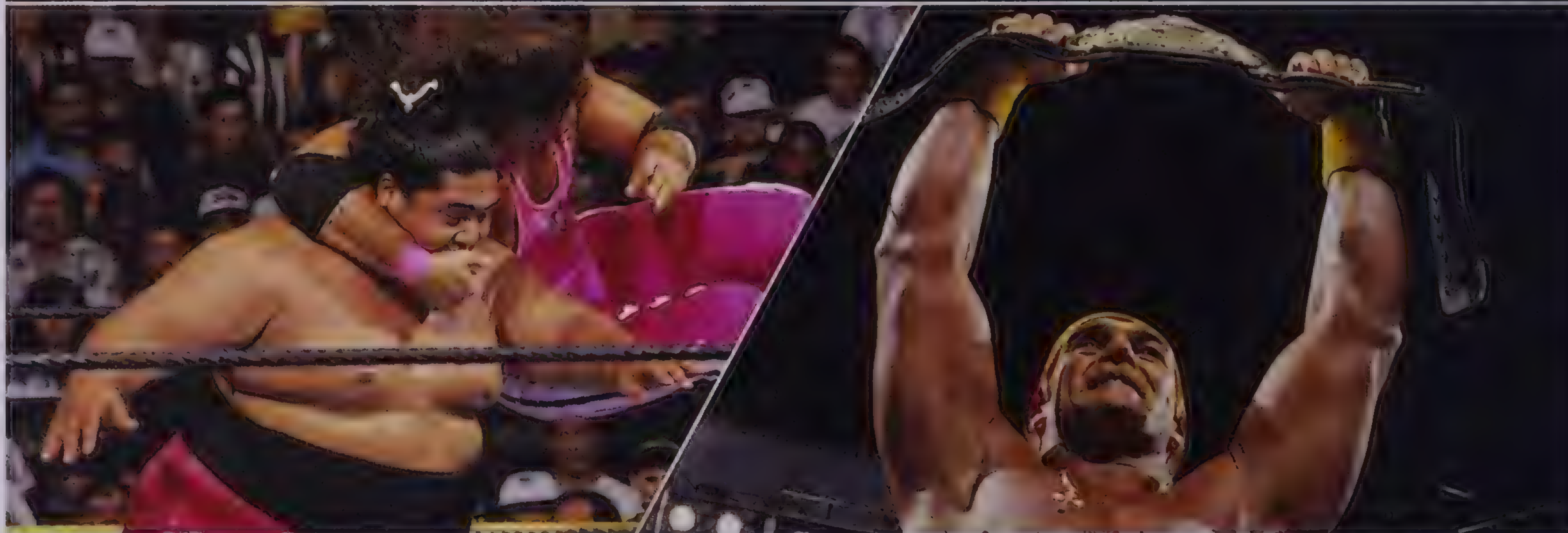
WrestleMania IX will forever be remembered as the first-ever outdoor *WrestleMania*. It also marked Jim Ross' first day on the job, WWE's first toga party, and the first time a Superstar *not* scheduled in the main event walked away with the WWE Championship. The advertised main event saw the mighty Yokozuna wrest the title away from Bret Hart. Moments later, however, an impromptu contest broke out, and Hogan topped the new titlist to claim the gold. Many insiders, most notably Hart, assumed Hogan used his stroke to strong arm his way back into the WWE spotlight.

WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP:

- › Money Inc. (c) defeated Hulk Hogan and Brutus Beefcake by DQ

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

- › Yokozuna defeated Bret Hart (c)



- › Hulk Hogan defeated Yokozuna (c)

66 I was always a loyal defender and a guy who always appreciated Hulk Hogan. But after I won the title, I realized that we weren't ever going to be friends again, that I had something that he wanted more than friendship. He gave me the cold shoulder...He hardly said a word to me when he returned to WWE until the day of WrestleMania when he was all chummy with me. I accepted [Hogan as champion]. I thought maybe it was best for the company. Maybe somehow I didn't live up to their expectations.

After Hogan took the title at WrestleMania, business started to plummet pretty seriously, and I had a feeling that I would end up with it again, and that they would see that going with Hogan was a mistake.



— Bret Hart



Venue: Madison Square Garden – New York, NY

Attendance: 19,444

WRESTLEMANIA X

MARCH 20, 1994

An event 10 years on the making, WrestleMania returned to its birthplace, Madison Square Garden, in March 1994. The historic spectacle was so highly-anticipated that, despite its lofty \$300 top ticket price, it sold out in less than one hour. Years later, *WrestleMania X* is still remembered as the site of two of its generation's greatest matches: Owen Hart versus Bret Hart, and Shawn Michaels versus Razor Ramon in a Ladder Match. Also, for the second year in a row, Yokozuna competed in two WWE Championship Matches and again, walked away without the gold. Instead, on this night, Bret Hart claimed his second WWE Title.

Madison Square Garden at that time, and today as well, was considered the mecca of all arenas all over the world. It's a name that is unequaled as far as arenas are concerned. 'Madison Square Garden' pretty much says it all. In the heart of New York City, if you can make it in Madison Square Garden, then you're a man everywhere in the world. So Madison Square Garden, still to this day, holds a very special place, not only for WWE, but for so many events.

— Vince McMahon



› Owen Hart defeated Bret Hart



OTHER MATCHES:

- › Bam Bam Bigelow and Luna Vachon defeated Doink and Dink
- › Earthquake defeated Adam Bomb

FALLS COUNT ANYWHERE:

- › Randy Savage defeated Crush

WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP:

- › Alundra Blayze (c) defeated Leilani Kai

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

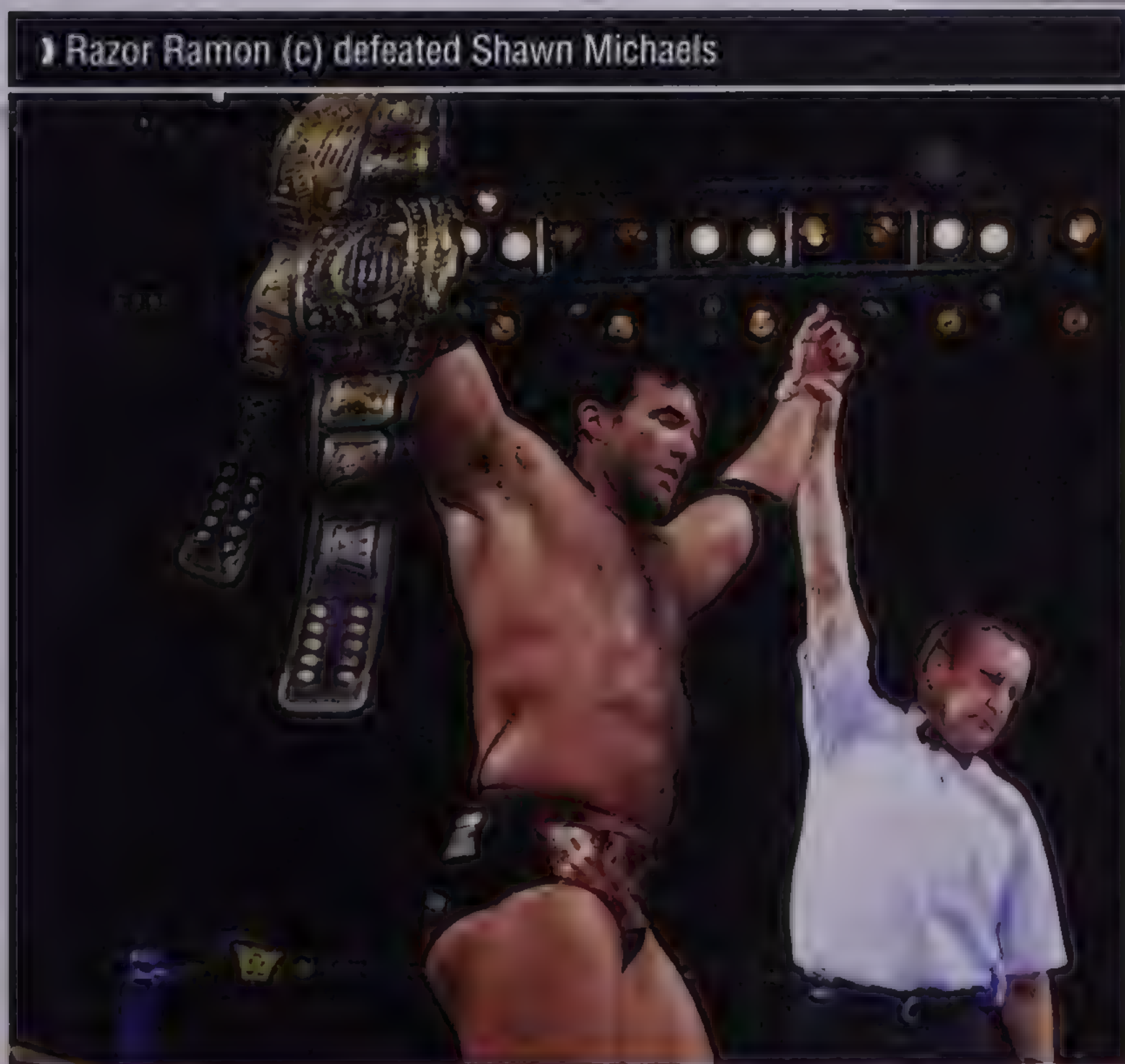
- › Yokozuna (c) defeated Lex Luger by DQ
- › Bret Hart defeated Yokozuna (c)

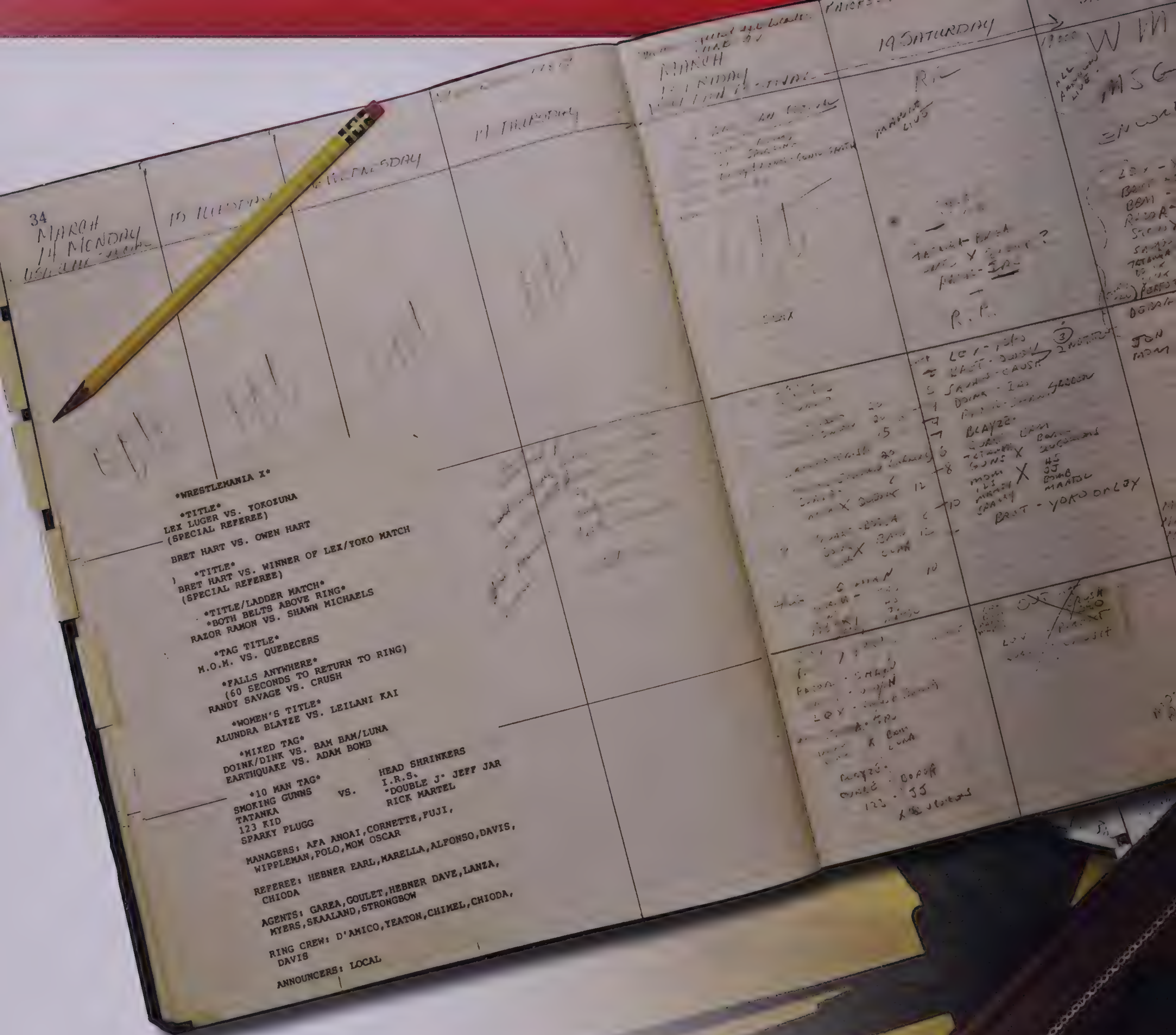
WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP:

- › Men on a Mission defeated The Quebecers (c) by count-out

INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP LADDER MATCH:

› Razor Ramon (c) defeated Shawn Michaels





The days leading up to WrestleMania X required careful planning, particularly the events surrounding WWE's Fan Festival in New York City.

A typed *WrestleMania X* card is taped to Vince McMahon's handwritten booking ledger. Three WWE Hall of Famers were featured in the night's main event, as "Rowdy" Roddy Piper officiated the match that saw Bret "Hit Man" Hart reclaim the WWE Championship from the mighty Yokozuna. In the end, time restrictions prevented the 10-man tag team match from appearing on the pay-per-view. Instead, the match took place on a subsequent episode of *Monday Night Raw*.

Like his father before him, Vince McMahon takes the time to carefully handwrite every card WWE produces. Today, WWE's warehouse is home to decades of booking ledgers that contain sports-entertainment's most memorable matches, including Andre the Giant vs. Hulk Hogan, Stone Cold Steve Austin vs. The Rock, and Triple H vs. Undertaker.

Not only do McMahon's ledgers include each card's matches, but they also note arena attendance, backstage producers, and notes on other entertainment options available in the marketplace.

Vince McMahon's handwritten booking ledgers are so detailed that they even note when WWE cards went up against NHL and NBA postseason games, as depicted in these pages from April/May 1994. During this period, Bret Hart vs. Owen Hart highlighted the majority of WWE cards. The brother vs. brother rivalry will forever be remembered as one of the most emotional in sports-entertainment history.

WRESTLEMANIA XI

WRESTLEMANIA XI
APRIL 2, 1995

Venue: Hartford Civic Center – Hartford, CT

Attendance: 16,305

The only *WrestleMania* to be held in WWE's home state of Connecticut, *WrestleMania XI* made front-page news when it was announced that NFL legend Lawrence Taylor would compete in a match against Bam Bam Bigelow. What many don't realize, though, is that the match almost never happened. Initially, Taylor spent weeks ducking WWE's calls. It wasn't until he played a round of golf with Lex Luger that L.T. became convinced that competing at *WrestleMania* was an opportunity that couldn't be missed.

It was very risky putting a non-WWE star in the main event. At the same time, Lawrence Taylor's athleticism was world class, competing with Bam Bam Bigelow, who was also a world-class athlete, at the time. I have to give credit to Bam Bam Bigelow, as well as to Lawrence Taylor, but especially to Bam Bam, for helping to make that match live up to its expectation.

— Vince McMahon



INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Razor Ramon defeated Jeff Jarrett (c) by DQ

WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Owen Hart and Yokozuna defeated Smokin' Gunns (c)

“I QUIT” MATCH: › Bret Hart defeated Bob Backlund

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Diesel (c) defeated Shawn Michaels

OTHER MATCHES:

› Lex Luger and British Bulldog defeated Eli and Jacob Blu

› Undertaker defeated King Kong Bundy

› Lawrence Taylor defeated Bam Bam Bigelow



WRESTLEMANIA XII

WRESTLEMANIA XII
MARCH 31, 1996

Venue: Arrowhead Pond – Anaheim, CA

Attendance: 18,853

After making arguably the most iconic entrance in WWE history, descending from the rafters high above the arena, Shawn Michaels realized his boyhood dream by defeating Bret Hart for the WWE Championship in a 60-minute Iron Man Match at *WrestleMania XII*. In the years that followed, HBK earned the distinction of being one of the greatest champions to ever lace a pair of boots. *WrestleMania XII* also marked the first-ever *WrestleMania* matches for Triple H and Stone Cold Steve Austin.

HOLLYWOOD BACKLOT BRAWL:

› Roddy Piper defeated Goldust

OTHER MATCHES:

› Owen Hart, British Bulldog, and Vader defeated Yokozuna, Jake Roberts, and Ahmed Johnson

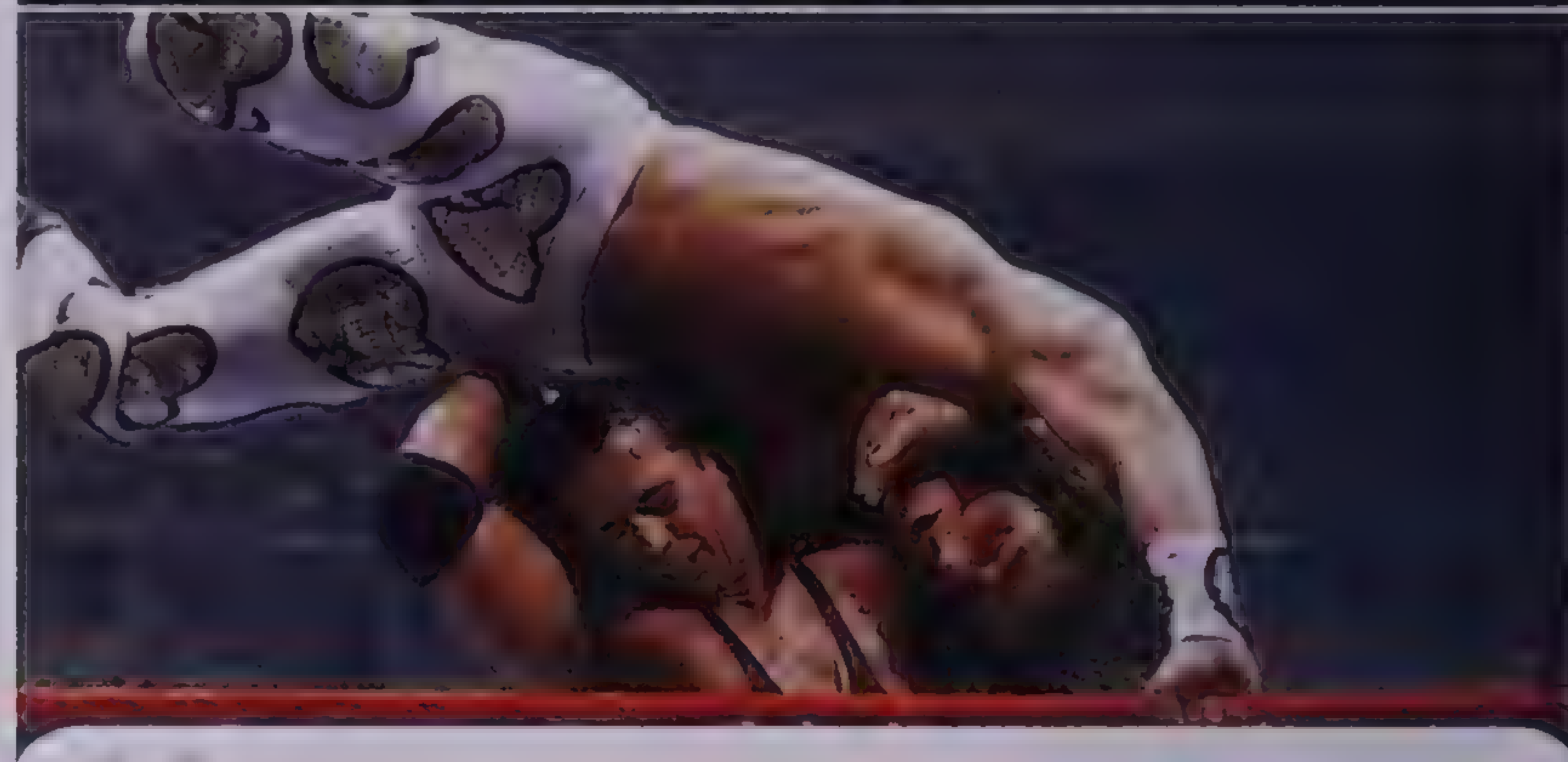
› The Ringmaster defeated Savio Vega

› Ultimate Warrior defeated Hunter Hearst-Helmsley

› Undertaker defeated Diesel

IRON MAN MATCH FOR THE WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Shawn Michaels defeated Bret Hart (c)



*Vince was not ready for an Iron Man Match; he thought it would be too long for pay-per-view. But I really believed that Bret and Shawn could tear the house down. After I suggested the match, I sort of retired from the business. But about three or four months later, Vince called me to see if I wanted to go to L.A. to see *WrestleMania* live and he told me the main event would be Bret Hart and Shawn Michaels in an Iron Man Match. I was so excited.*

I remember sitting in the crowd, watching the match. When Shawn Michaels became champion, I'm not joking, I had tears in my eyes because I felt bad for Bret losing the championship, but then again, I felt so happy for Shawn winning the championship. I think from that moment on, Shawn Michaels grew up a little bit. I think he started to understand the business, and that people were behind him and trying to help him. It was one of the greatest matches I've ever seen; it really was.

— Pat Patterson





Venue: Rosemont Horizon – Rosemont, IL

Attendance: 18,211

WRESTLEMANIA 13

MARCH 23, 1997

When the 1997 *Royal Rumble* concluded, many assumed Shawn Michaels would return to the *WrestleMania* main event to defend his newly-won WWE Championship. But an injury forced HBK out of the event, and left WWE in a period of uncertainty. By *WrestleMania 13*, uncertainty turned to opportunity for two Superstars who eventually stole the show: Undertaker and Stone Cold Steve Austin.

Undertaker topped Sycho Sid in the main event to claim the WWE Championship, and in an unforgettable contest earlier in the evening, Bret Hart defeated Austin in a Submission Match when excessive blood loss caused Stone Cold to pass out. The result of the match proved to be secondary, however, as everybody walked away from the event respecting Austin's undying resolve and questioning Hart's venomous actions. It was one of sports-entertainment's rare instances when fans' opinions of *both* Superstars changed over the course of a single match.



SUBMISSION MATCH:

► Bret Hart defeated Stone Cold Steve Austin



That's the greatest wrestling you can get. It was just so emotional, so intense and so underlying and so beautiful to watch. I always think it's one of the most beautiful matches. I think there's a certain heartache that goes out the second you see Steve Austin losing, when he couldn't get out of the Sharpshooter. For everybody that hated him up to that point, it's like their hearts all break and they go, 'You can't do that to Steve Austin.'

There's so many little meanings in that match that wrestling fans can decipher over the next 100 years about psychology and timing and I just know that it doesn't get any better than that. Two wrestlers working together and putting forward a story that's going to stick in people's minds for years. I know for me personally that there's no better feeling I get from that match than when I walk back to the dressing room after the match. I always think about it; that was the end of my Bret Hart good guy character. For all intents and purposes, it died that night. There was a certain something that was so powerful about the intensity and adrenaline and the realism when I was walking back to the dressing room. That's what every young wrestler wants to emulate.



— Bret Hart

INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP:

► Rocky Maivia (c) defeated The Sultan

NO. 1 CONTENDERS TAG TEAM

FATAL FOUR WAY ELIMINATION MATCH:

► Headbangers defeated The Godwinns, The New Blackjacks, and Doug Furnas and Phil LaFon

WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP:

► Owen Hart and British Bulldog (c) vs. Mankind and Vader ended in a double count-out

CHICAGO STREET FIGHT:

► Ahmed Johnson and Legion of Doom defeated Nation of Domination

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

► Undertaker defeated Sycho Sid (c)

OTHER MATCHES:

► Hunter Hearst-Helmsley defeated Goldust



Venue: FleetCenter – Boston, MA

Attendance: 19,028

WRESTLEMANIA XIV

MARCH 29, 1998

By *WrestleMania XIV*, WWE had already become a considerably edgier product, highlighted by Stone Cold Steve Austin's ever-present middle finger and D-Generation X's constant crotch chopping. So it was only natural that the main event of *WrestleMania XIV* featured Austin vs. Shawn Michaels, especially considering Stone Cold was in the midst of an historic rise to the top of the industry. HBK, on the other hand, was battling career-threatening injuries and distressing personal demons. In the end, Austin left *WrestleMania* with the WWE Title and HBK simply left.

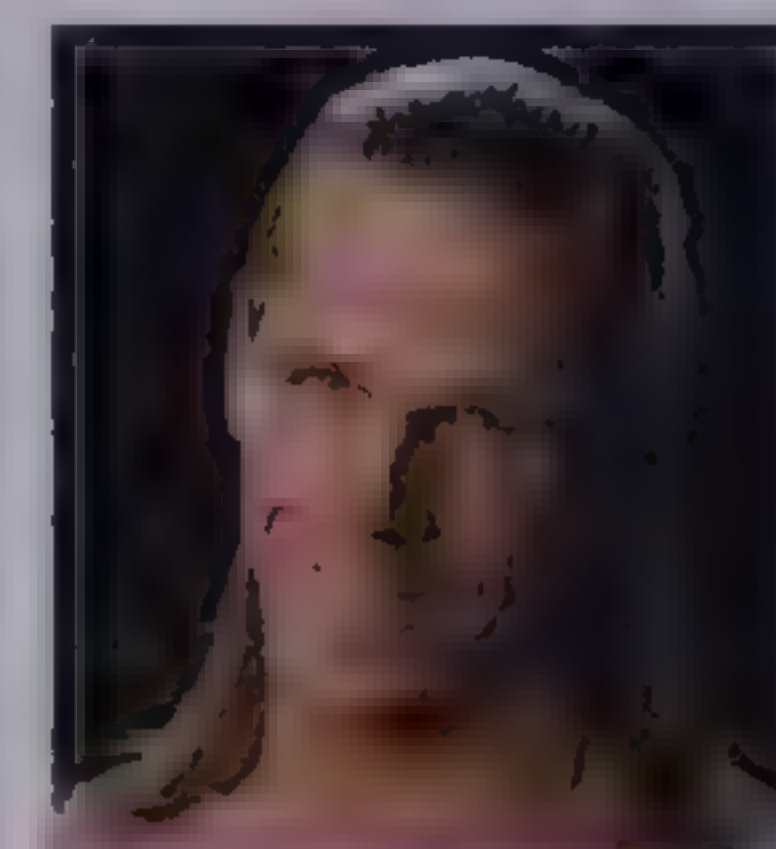
WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Stone Cold Steve Austin defeated Shawn Michaels (c)



“There wasn't anybody that didn't recognize that Steve was the guy that should take the company into the future. Everybody was on board for that. But I think Steve's the kind of guy that thinks there's a lot of people fighting him, and that there were a lot of people that didn't want [him on top]. In reality, I think everybody recognized his value. That's one of those things, I've even seen interviews in the past where Steve said, 'Shawn didn't want to let go of that title.' I got news for you: If I didn't want to let go of it, it wouldn't have happened. Anybody who knows me knows it wouldn't have happened. Plain and simple. The fact of the matter is the title needed to go to Steve. I didn't have issues with Stone Cold Steve Austin. I had a real-life issue with the company and a real-life issue with myself at that time. So the injuries and the attitude and everything else that I had going on made it more difficult for me. But I had no issues with Stone Cold Steve Austin.”

— Shawn Michaels



LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Taka Michinoku (c) defeated Aguila

INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP:

› The Rock (c) defeated Ken Shamrock by DQ

DUMPSTER MATCH FOR THE WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Cactus Jack and Chainsaw Charlie defeated New Age Outlaws (c)

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Triple H (c) defeated Owen Hart

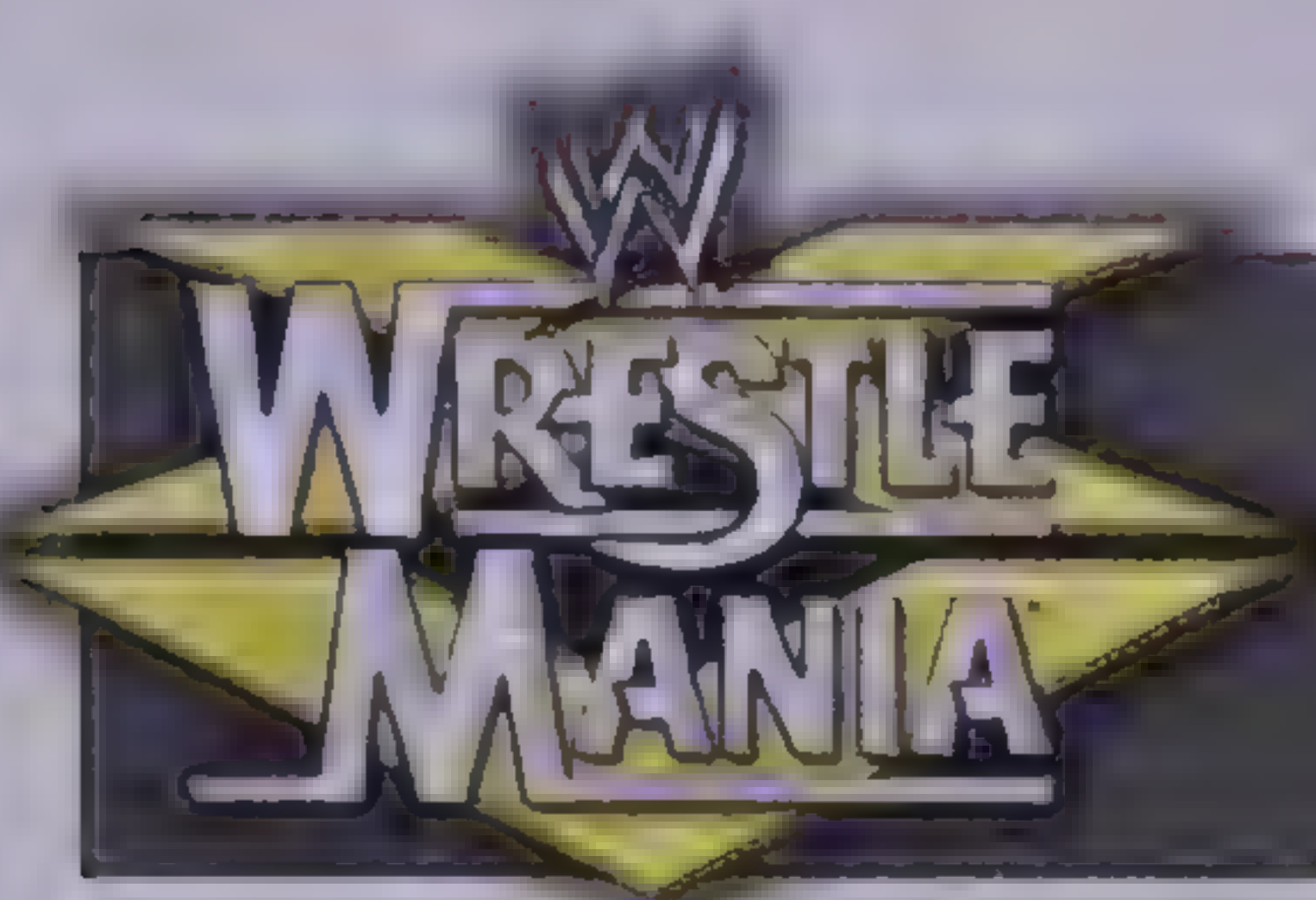
OTHER MATCHES:

› Tag Team Battle Royal: L.O.D. 2000 won

› Marc Mero and Sable defeated The Artist Formerly Known as Goldust and Luna

› Undertaker defeated Kane





Venue: First Union Center – Philadelphia, PA

Attendance: 19,514

WRESTLEMANIA XV

MARCH 28, 1999

The rivalry between The Rock and Stone Cold Steve Austin will forever be recognized as one of *WrestleMania*'s all-time greatest. On three separate occasions, the iconic Superstars main-evented the biggest night of the year, with Austin taking two of the three encounters. *WrestleMania XV* marked their first meeting on the grandest stage. On this night, Austin defeated The Rock to reclaim the WWE Championship.

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Stone Cold Steve Austin defeated The Rock (c)



HARDCORE CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Hardcore Holly defeated Al Snow and Billy Gunn (c)

WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Owen Hart and Jeff Jarrett (c) defeated Test and D-Lo Brown

BRAWL 4 ALL:

› Butterbean defeated Bart Gunn by knockout

INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Road Dogg (c) defeated Ken Shamrock, Val Venis, and Goldust

WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Sable (c) defeated Tori

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Shane McMahon (c) defeated X-Pac

HELL IN A CELL: › Undertaker defeated Big Boss Man

OTHER MATCHES:

› Mankind defeated Big Show by DQ

› Kane defeated Triple H by DQ

WrestleMania XV was a hell of a match. I enjoyed every bit of it, but I had to get through some personal problems to make that match. I was going through a divorce at that time. I had so much going on personally that I forgot to pack my vest. I was so damn pissed off when I opened my bag to get dressed and realized I'd forgotten my vest. I always wore my black leather Stone Cold vest; that was my look; that was my gimmick. So I had to wear that scrubby-ass T-shirt out there. That's one thing that irks me to this day.

— Stone Cold Steve Austin



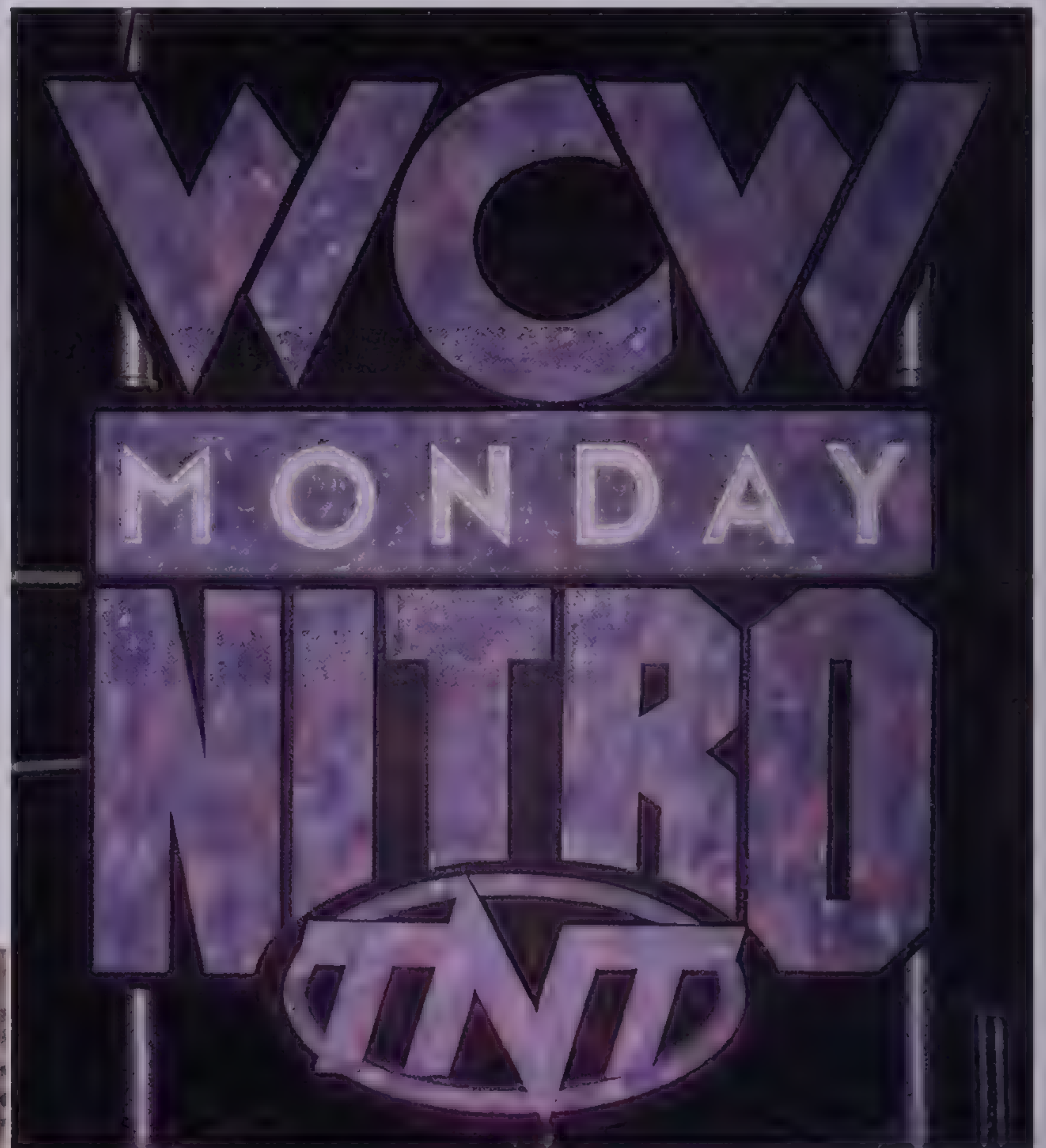
MONDAY NIGHT WAR:

THE BEGINNING

After more than two years of unopposed success on Monday nights, *Raw* had solidified itself as the preeminent program in all of sports-entertainment. But while WWE was busy producing its popular hour-long weekly show, Ted Turner was in Atlanta devising his next plan of attack in his ongoing rivalry with Vince McMahon. For Turner, owning a sports-entertainment company wasn't enough; he wanted to be the best. So in June 1995, Turner summoned WCW boss Eric Bischoff to his office to devise a plan to compete with WWE.

"Bischoff was Ted's puppet, and a very good one," says McMahon. "[But we were up against] Ted's resources, Ted's personality. Ted's personality is one coming at you, trying to hurt you. That's his *modus operandi*, if you will. He tries to hurt his competitor. I understand that philosophy. And if I can, I'll get around to it. But the most important thing for us is to help ourselves first. It's a completely different philosophy."

In order to compete with WWE, Bischoff told Turner during the fateful June 1995 meeting that primetime television was a must for WCW. Within minutes, Turner gave Bischoff a coveted spot on TNT on Monday nights, opposite WWE's *Raw*.



"I thought it was really stupid when he first came head to head with us," recalls McMahon. "I was like, 'Are you kidding me? Why would you want to do that?' We had been established for a long time and it didn't make any sense because he'd have a much higher rating if he was on a Tuesday night or any other night than Monday."

Despite McMahon's bewilderedness, Bischoff spent the next few months molding his new Monday night show. With the goal of launching something considerably different than *Raw*, he created *Monday Nitro*, a live program that emanated from big or unique venues and featured somewhat edgy content. This was a far cry from WWE's Monday night offering at the time, which was oftentimes taped from smaller arenas, and portrayed a more traditional good guy-versus-bad guy vibe.





In retrospect, I could have done it with the proper notification. I didn't feel like it was handled in the most professional way by me. I felt at the time I wasn't really given the choice.

— Lex Luger



Wisely, WCW chose to premiere its first *Monday Nitro* on September 4, 1995, a night when they would have the full attention of WWE's audience, due to *Raw* being preempted on the USA Network in favor of U.S. Open tennis. It seemed as though all the stars were aligned for a successful *Nitro* launch. But just to be sure, Bischoff stacked the deck even more by surprisingly bringing back Lex Luger for the first show.

"Sting was the primary facilitator for my return," says Luger. "He thought it would be really cool for me to come back to WCW. We always traveled together. We were very close, personal friends and still are close friends. So he got me together with Eric Bischoff to see if something could be worked out. It was actually at Sting's house that we met."

Luger's appearance on the first *Nitro* shocked the sports-entertainment world, especially considering he had just competed for WWE the night before. At the time, it was commonplace for competitors to give at least two weeks' notice prior to departing a company, but WCW feared that the surprise factor would be diminished if they waited to debut Luger. So they covered his head with a towel and snuck him into the locker room area just hours after Luger had competed in a WWE ring and minutes before his scheduled WCW debut. The perception of a WWE Superstar showing up on WCW television on a night that regularly belonged to *Raw* was a clear sign that WCW was on the attack.

"I was really angry and felt threatened by Ted Turner and his organization," says McMahon. "They owned networks and it's one thing to be in competition with us—fine that's the great American way—but it's another to come right at us and try to diminish our audience, which, in my view, was Ted's plan. Ted's plan was to hurt his opponent. Why else if you own networks and can put a television show on whenever you wish would you do it directly against us? The only logical reason is to hurt us, hurt us to the extent we would become weakened."

As anticipated, *Nitro* began to pull viewers from *Raw*. And for the next several months, WCW and WWE traded victories in the Monday night ratings war. For fans, it marked the beginning of one of the greatest eras in sports-entertainment history. Many watched with their remote controls in hand, switching back and forth between shows, hoping to consume as much of each product as possible.

WWE Raw, August 28, 1995



WCW Nitro, September 4, 1995

Alundra Blayze



In an attempt to prevent viewers from jumping to *Raw*, WCW employed a series of tactics that many insiders perceived as underhanded. Among the most infamous was the signing of then WWE Women's Champion Alundra Blayze. When Blayze made her *Nitro* debut in December 1995, she brought her WWE title with her and subsequently dumped it in a garbage can, showing a complete disregard for WWE and its championship's history.

WCW also regularly told its *Nitro* viewers the results of *Raw* shows that were previously recorded. "I want to let all you fans know with a remote in your hands, over [on *Raw*], here's how it goes down..." Bischoff would say prior to delivering the entire show's results.

"It was dirty pool," says McMahon. "As soon as he started giving our results away, it was painful. It was like, 'Wait a minute, you don't have to do that one.' Some of the other dirty tricks concerned me because it was like how deep do you go with the dirt? Do you go so far that you box me in and then I am going to have to do something stupid? It didn't get that far, but it was close."

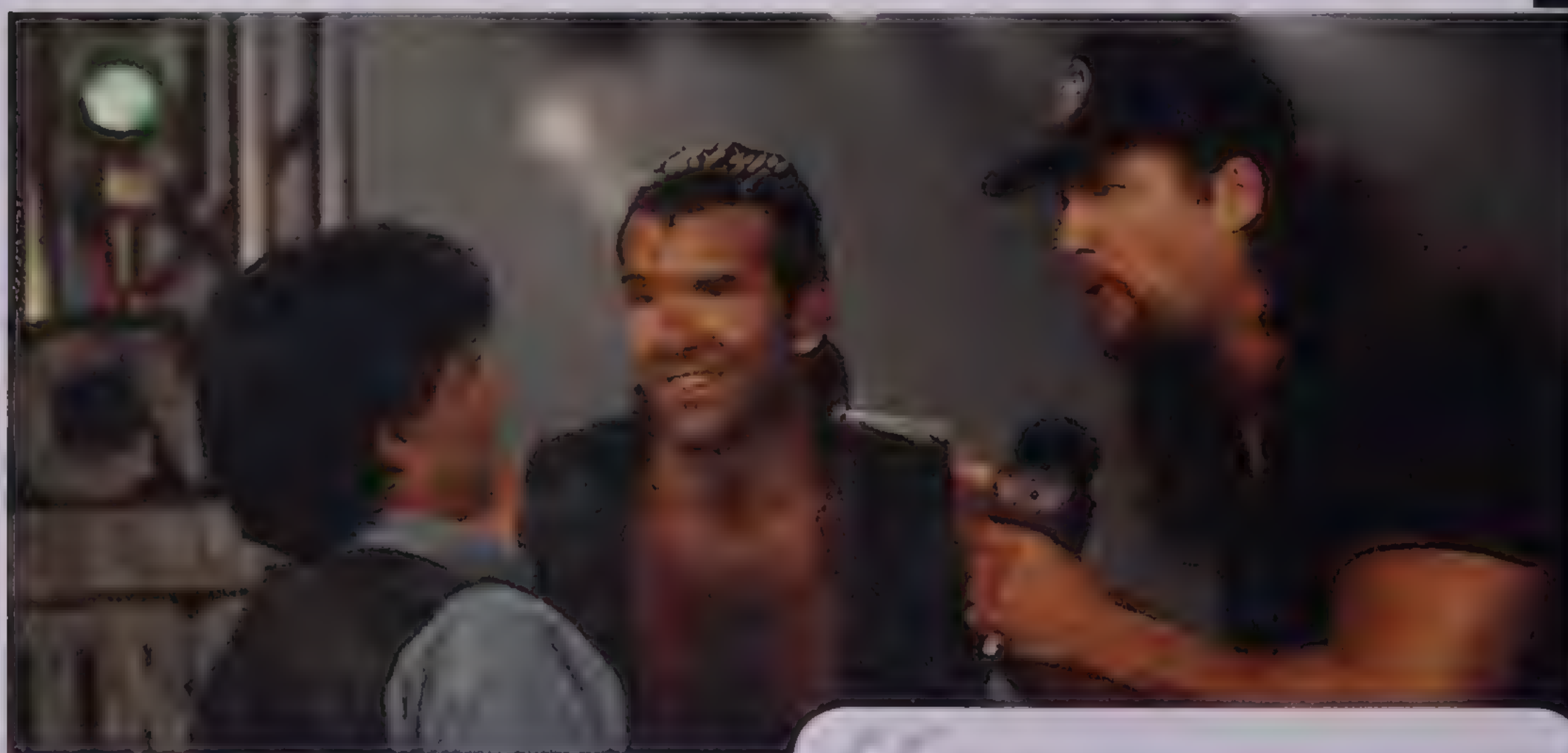
“It was sort of a tawdry thing to do. I think it was meant to be a kick in the groin by the WCW guys. ‘Oh, let’s kick him right in the groin, this will do it.’ Nope, it didn’t.”

— Vince McMahon on Alundra Blayze dumping the Women's Championship

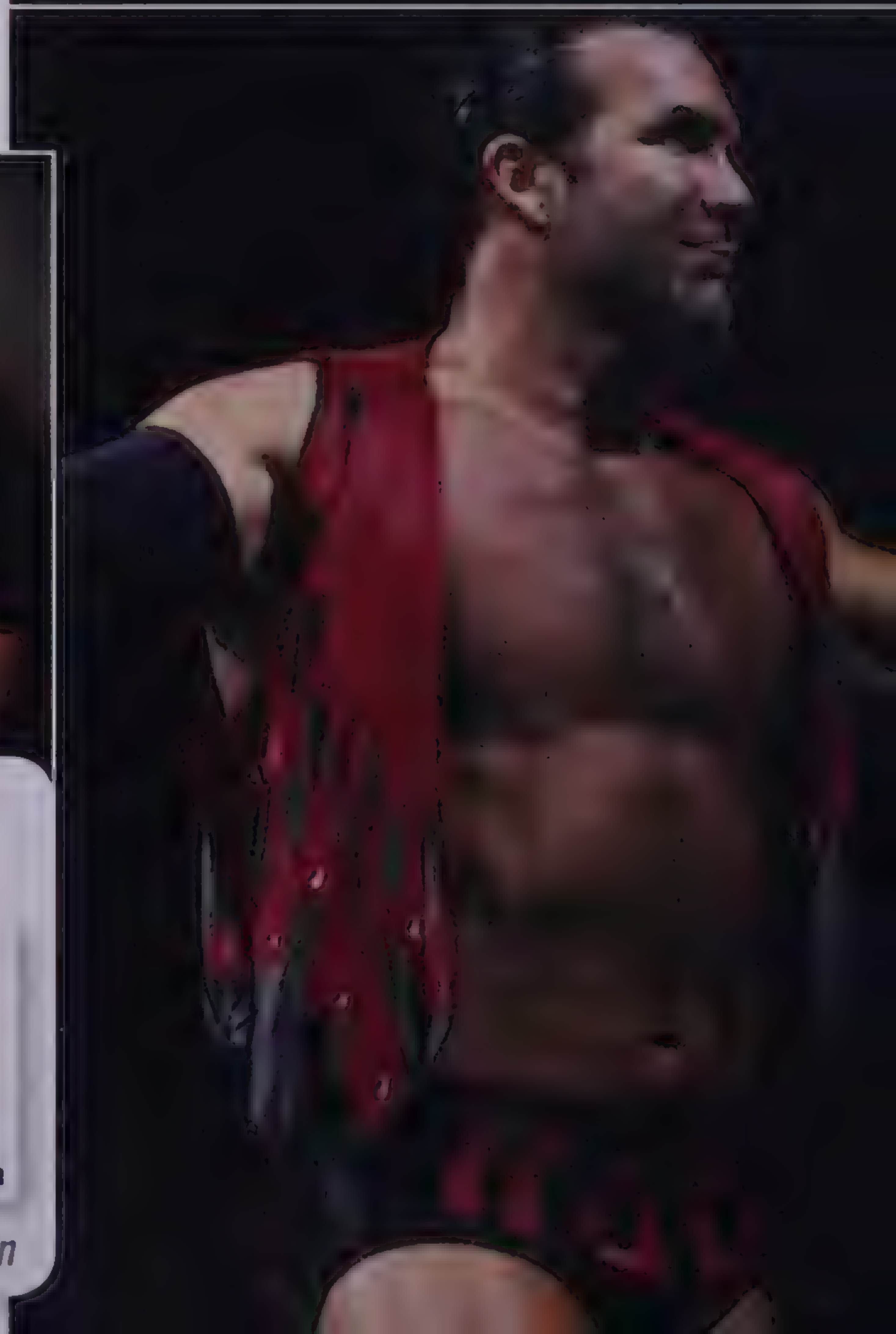


TALENT RAID

By the Spring of 1996, WCW had already acquired a large number of former WWE Superstars, including Hulk Hogan, Brutus Beefcake, Jim Duggan, and Randy Savage. And while these names certainly helped WCW solidify itself as a national powerhouse, it was the signing of Scott Hall and Kevin Nash that helped propel *Nitro* to the top spot.

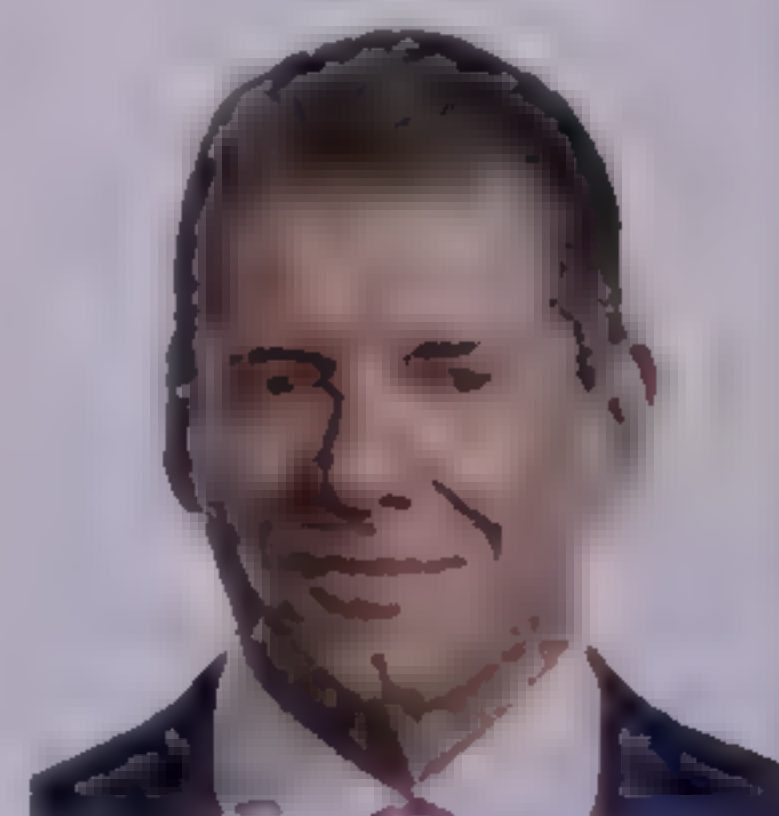


Scott Hall



At the time, Hall and Nash were major players within WWE. Hall, who portrayed Razor Ramon, was a multiple-time Intercontinental Champion and a talent who produced top-quality matches every night. Nash, known then as Diesel, was a former WWE Champion and perennial main-eventer.

“There’s no question, from a perception standpoint and from a bottom line standpoint, there were times when I wasn’t too sure whether or not we were going to survive as we knew it.”



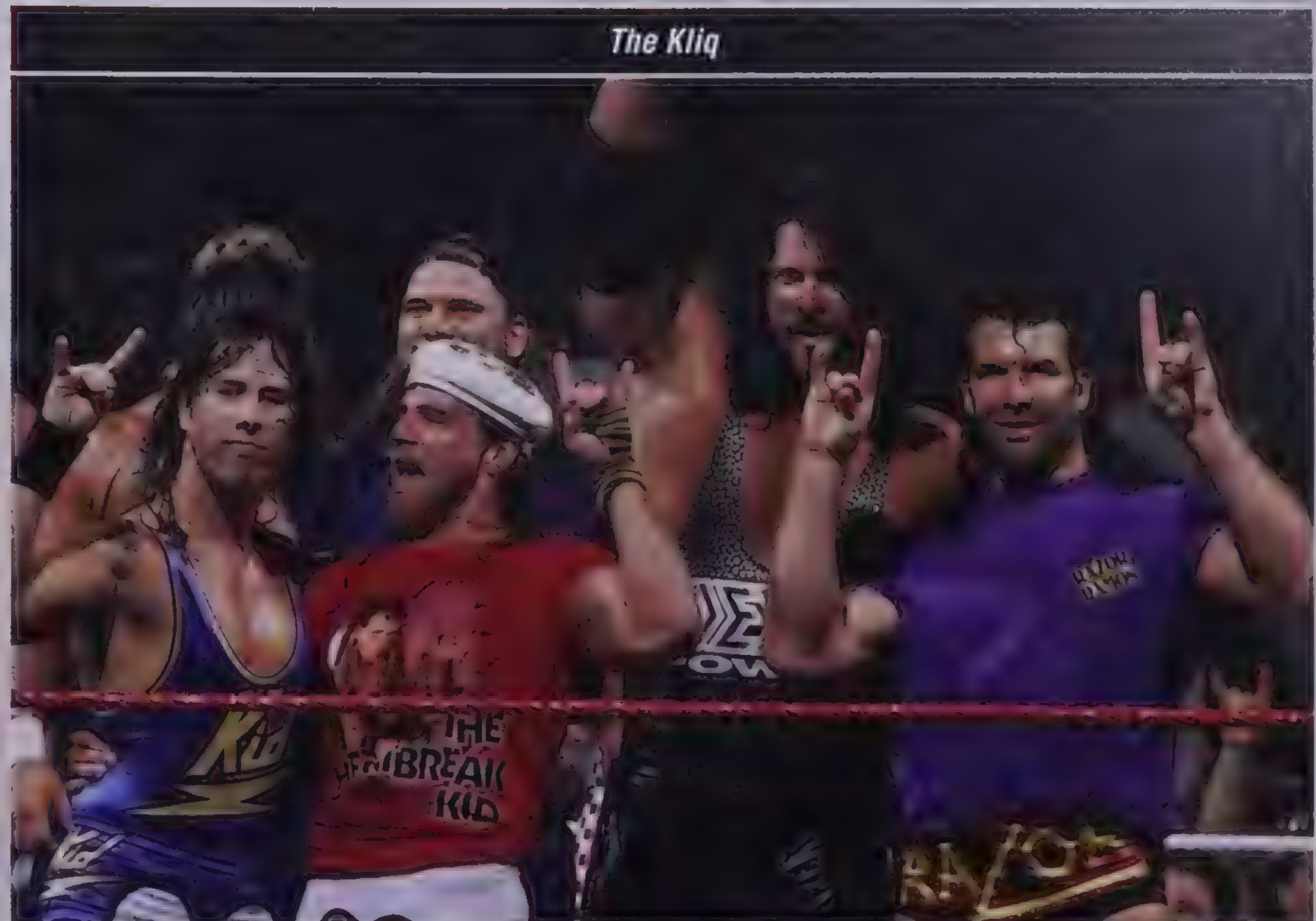
—Vince McMahon

"They were great guys," recalls McMahon. "They reluctantly left here, and I understood why. I wouldn't guarantee a contract in those days and they had no alternative but to go. If I had been them, I think I would have taken the money because that's the business we're in. They were loyal and I think they were still loyal to the brand when they were at WCW."

"We had numerous discussions, they gave me many opportunities to match Ted Turner's offer or to come close. I didn't even have to match it, but it had to be guaranteed with an upside, and at the time we just weren't doing that. I didn't think I could afford it. How could I compete with Ted Turner?"

Hall and Nash also carried a heavy influence backstage, along with other members of their "Kliq," Shawn Michaels and Triple H. In their final Madison Square Garden appearance before leaving for WCW, the duo joined Michaels and Triple H in the middle of the ring for an emotional embrace. Known today as the Curtain Call, the incident, which was done without proper approval, broke a handful of sports-entertainment's unwritten rules, most notably it pulled the curtain back to reveal that this mix of good and bad guys were actually close friends behind the scenes.

"The worst part about it is Vince's father was elected into the MSG Hall of Fame and I knew that meant so much to Vince," recalls Vince Russo. "So when these four guys did their Curtain Call together and broke **kayfabe**, the only thing I was thinking about was Vince's dad, how much that meant to Vince and how what they did was disrespectful to Vince."



Kevin Nash



With Hall and Nash under contract to WCW and Michaels being WWE's biggest draw at the time, Triple H was left to take the bulk of the punishment. Prior to the Curtain Call, many within WWE pointed to Triple H as the next winner of the prestigious *King of the Ring* tournament. Instead, he soon found himself losing to the likes of Marc Mero and Freddie Joe Floyd.

"Hunter's life was made to be miserable in the months that followed," says Russo. "I remember having so many conversations with him. 'Bro, hang in there; they're just testing you. This will pass, this will pass.' There was a good time there, probably three months or so, that Hunter walked around the back without ever opening his mouth."

KAYFABE

"Kayfabe" is an insider term that is associated with protecting the industry's inner workings or secrets. For example, the fact that Scott Hall, Kevin Nash, Shawn Michaels, and Triple H were all close friends behind the scenes would be considered kayfabe in 1996.

Another infamous example of Superstars breaking kayfabe happened in 1987 when Jim Duggan and rival The Iron Sheik were pulled over and subsequently arrested for drug possession. To many, the fact that two rivals were travelling together in the same car was the most shocking bit of news that came from the incident.

With Triple H in the doghouse, Stone Cold Steve Austin went on to win the *King of the Ring* crown. Historically, Stone Cold's victory led to the birth of Austin 3:16 and helped catapult the rising competitor to unparalleled superstardom. Today, many sports-entertainment historians look back at the 1996 *King of the Ring* and wonder how different the WWE landscape might've been if Triple H was never punished for his involvement in the Curtain Call.

“Triple H did take the brunt of the ‘heat’ when it came down to it.”

—Vince McMahon



While Triple H quietly worked his way back up the WWE card, Hall and Nash were revolutionizing Monday nights with WCW. The duo strategically debuted without any prior marketing, giving the impression that they were outsiders invading the promotion. WCW didn't even mention their names on television, which led many viewers to assume Razor Ramon and Diesel were legitimately working on WWE's behalf. To counter this, WWE filed a lawsuit against Turner Broadcasting for having talent appear on WCW programming as their WWE characters. This forced Eric Bischoff to have Hall and Nash deny on camera that they were working for WWE.



“Austin 3:16 says I just whipped your ass!”

“They wanted Scott sitting ringside during a live *Nitro* taping, and our cameras, of course, were supposed to be on him,” claims WCW's Larry Zbyszko in regards to Hall's debut. “I said, ‘It makes no sense, it's got to make sense. Here's a guy who's a bad guy, he is a WWE Superstar, he's invading WCW. Make it look like he's invading. Do something that's never been done before. Don't film him like we're schmucks. You have Scott Hall walk down, bust into that ring, and stop the match. The guys will freak out. The announcers will be completely stumped and befuddled.’”

"I even told them to have some truck voice pitch in and say, 'Close the mics, close the mics.' Make it sound like the whole thing is crumbling because WWE is starting to attack our guys in the ring."

Viewers' interest was piqued, and it only intensified when Hulk Hogan later joined Hall and Nash to form the New World Order. After the official nWo creation in July 1996, WWE failed to win another Monday night ratings battle until April 1998. Over that time, WCW began to see a steady increase in viewership, while WWE's was on the decline. There were even nights when *Nitro* would more than double the rating of *Raw*.

"You can call this the New World Order of wrestling, brother!"

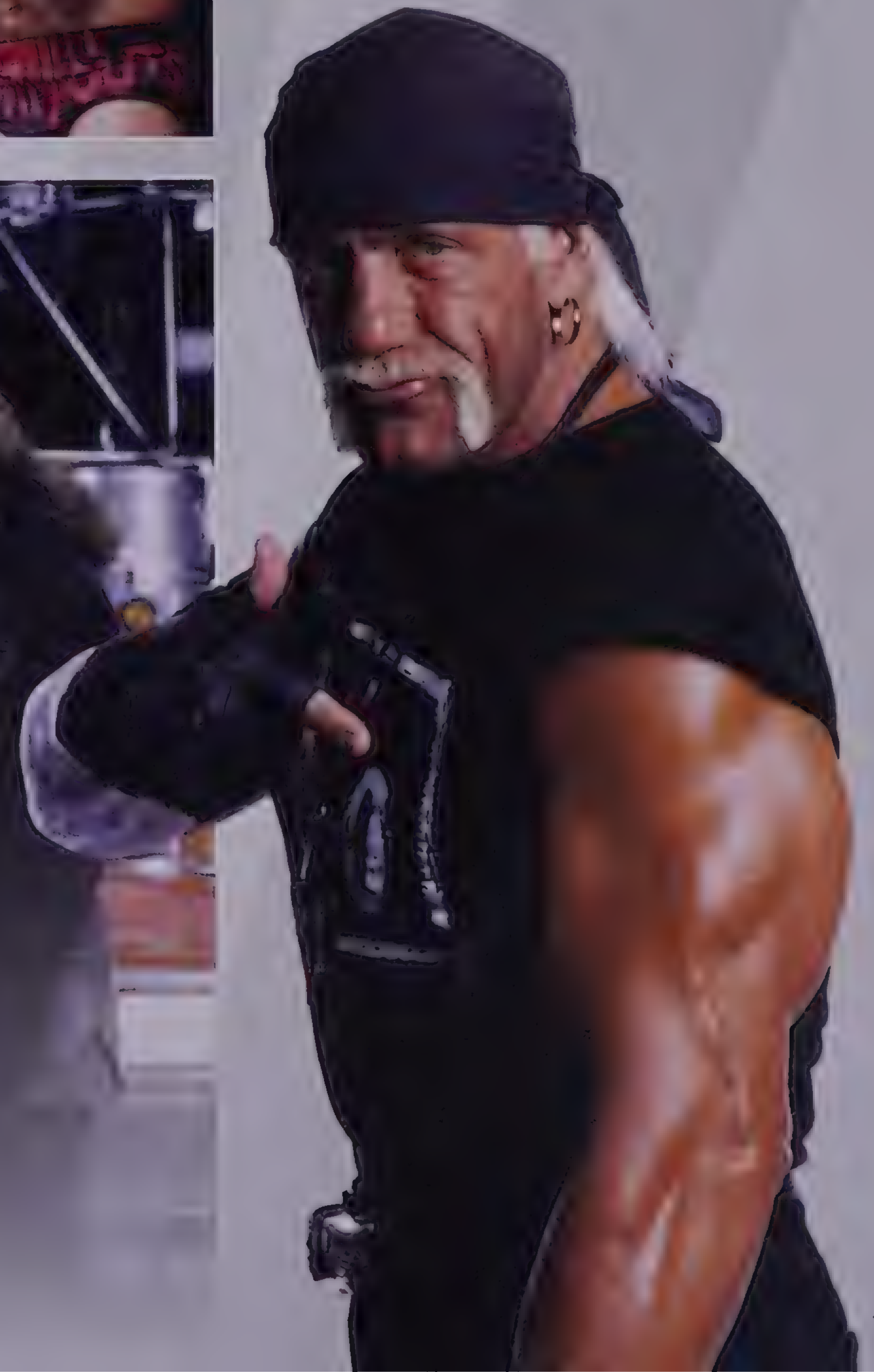


It was bad enough that we were going to mortgage our retirement home. Those are some times you don't forget.



— Vince McMahon

"During the 84 weeks that *Nitro* beat *Raw* in the ratings, morale was unusual. It was nothing I had ever experienced before," recalls Stephanie McMahon. "People were concerned, but I think that Vince's spirit, that fighting spirit, really permeated down through everybody. We all wanted to fight. We all wanted to win. And we all came together in a way that I think most companies would die to have their employees come together to join forces."



MONDAY NIGHT WAR:

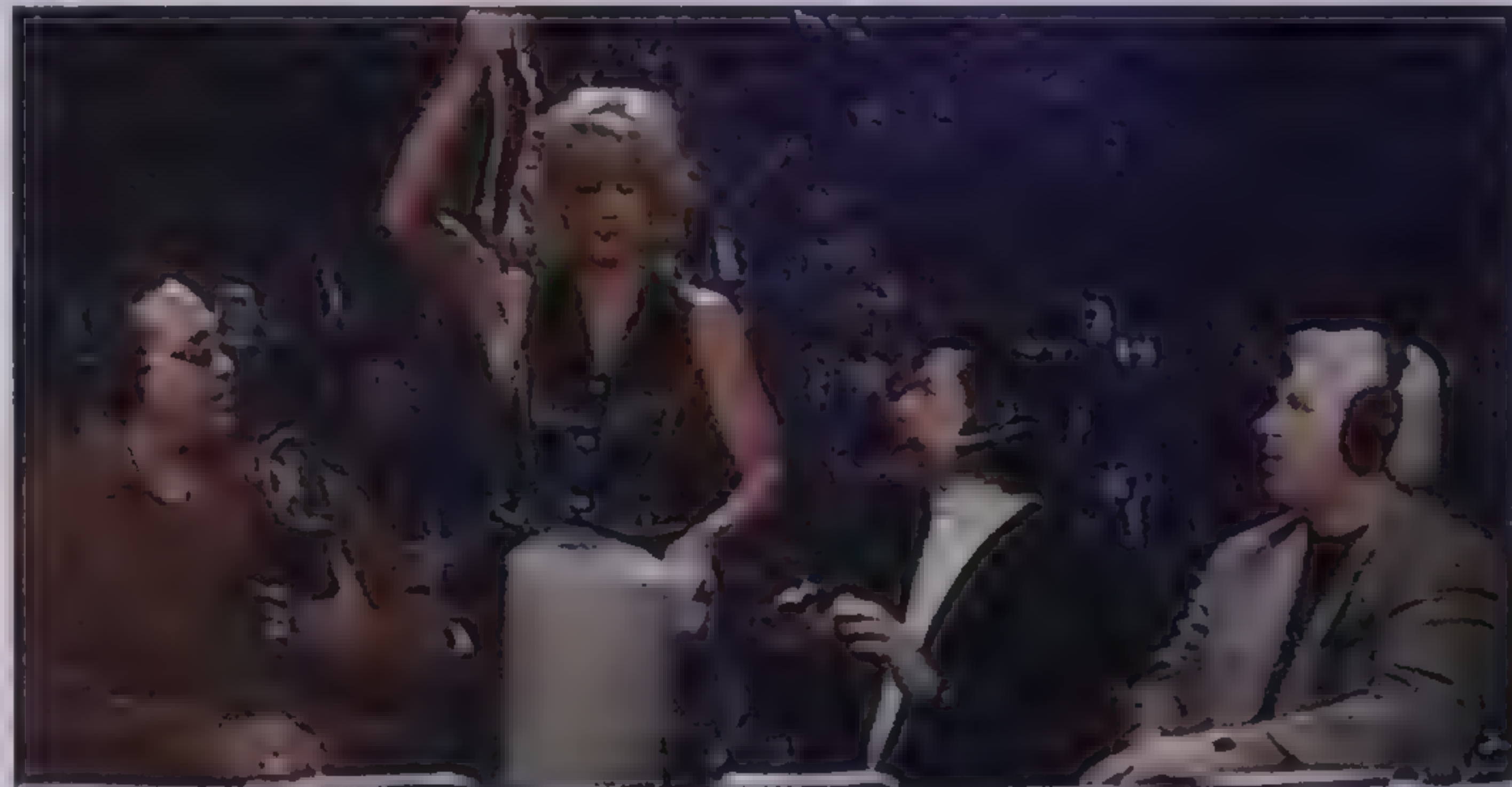
RATINGS CHART



Monday Nitro debuts; Lex Luger returns to WCW



Vader attacks Gorilla Monsoon



Nitro: Madusa, formerly known as Alundra Blayze, throws the WWE Women's Championship in the trash

Nitro: Ric Flair defeats Sting; Lex Luger defeats Randy Savage; Hulk Hogan defeats Meng

Raw: Ted DiBiase presents the Million Dollar Championship to the Ringmaster

Raw: Sid defeats Razor Ramon in the main event

NITRO

RAW

09/04/1995

09/11/1995

09/18/1995

09/25/1995

10/02/1995

10/09/1995

10/16/1995

10/23/1995

10/30/1995

11/06/1995

11/13/1995

11/20/1995

11/27/1995

12/04/1995

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01/08/1996

01/15/1996

01/22/1996

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1996

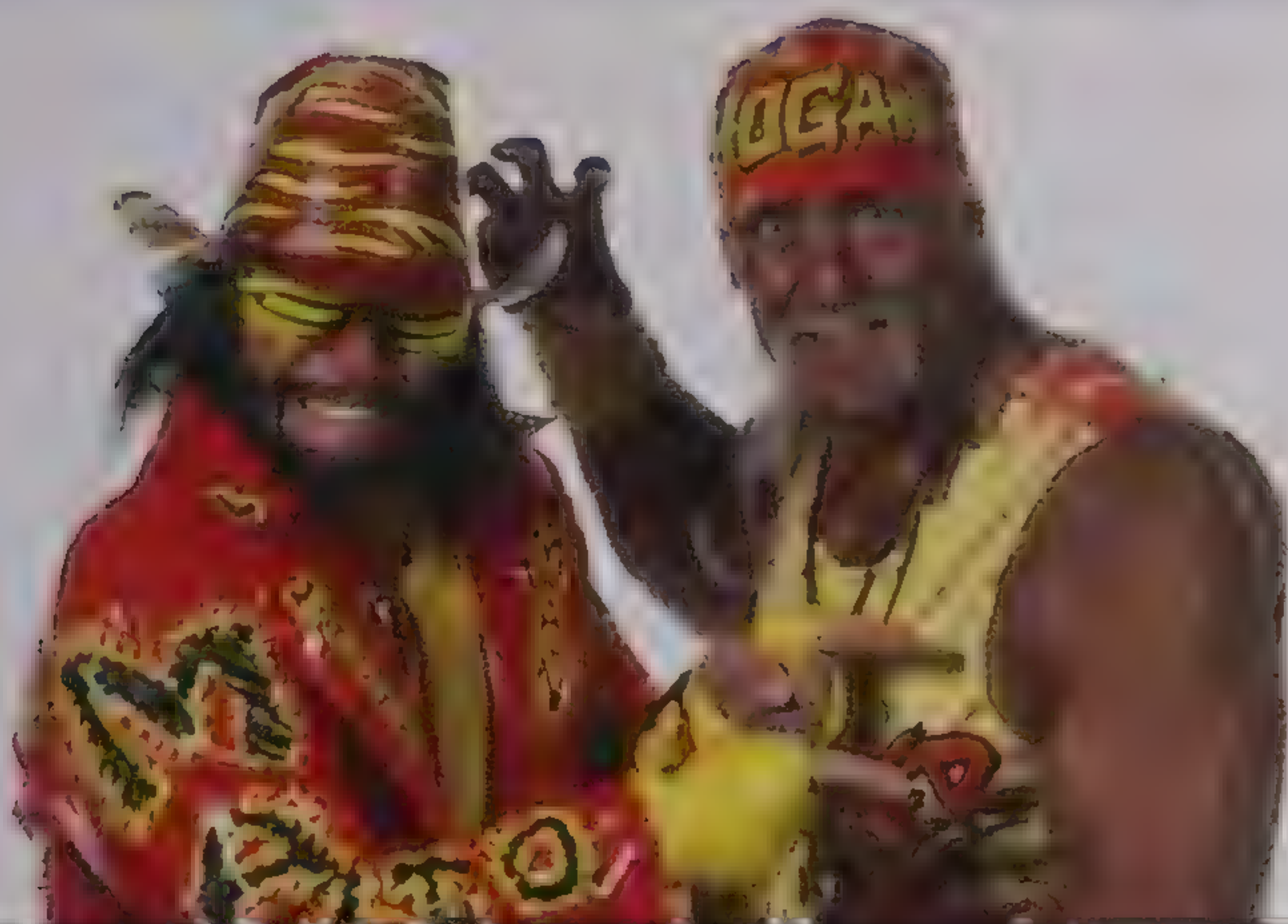
Raw runs unopposed; WWE Champion Shawn Michaels defeats Jerry Lawler



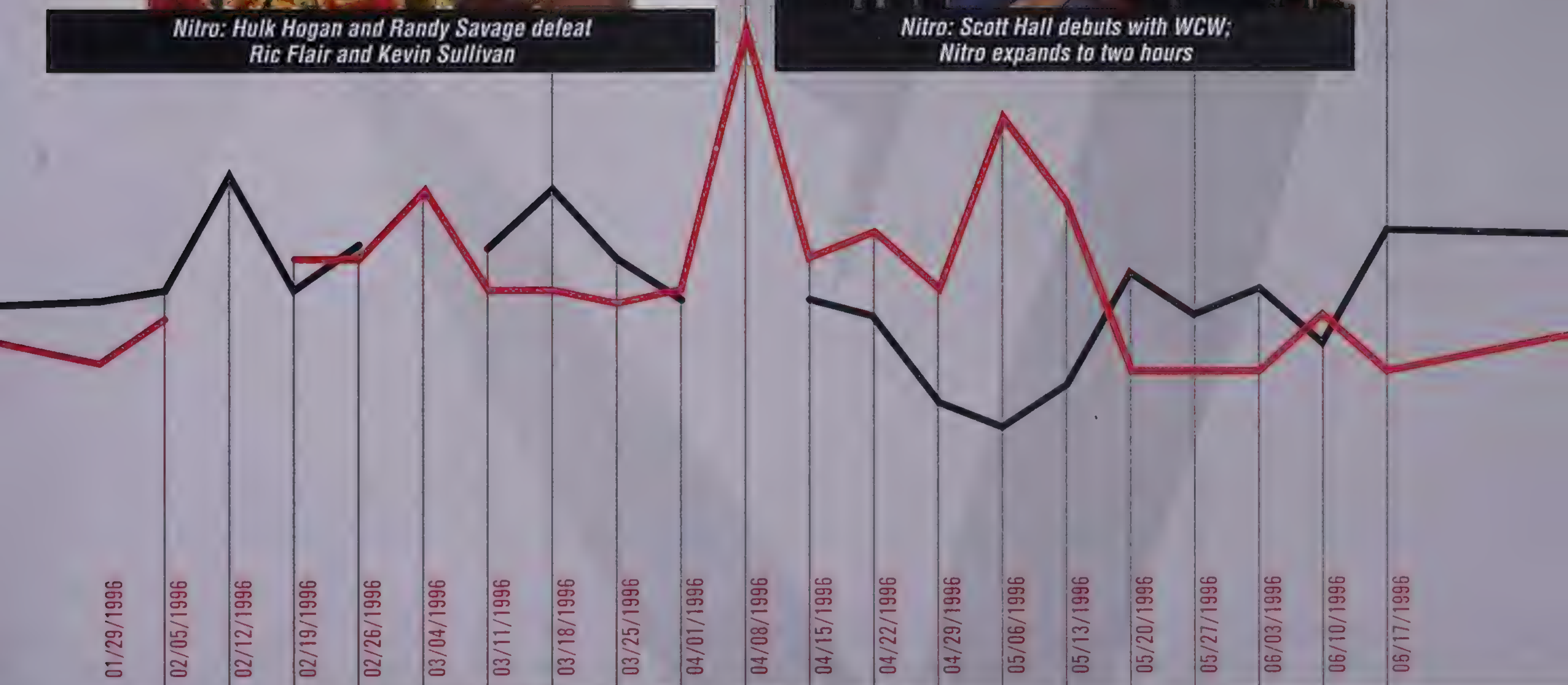
Nitro begins ratings victory streak over Raw



Nitro: Hulk Hogan and Randy Savage defeat Ric Flair and Kevin Sullivan



Nitro: Scott Hall debuts with WCW; Nitro expands to two hours





Raw main event: WWE Champion Shawn Michaels defeats Steve Austin
Nitro main event: Harlem Heat vs. Meng and Barbarian (no contest)



First Nitro after Hulk Hogan joined the New World Order

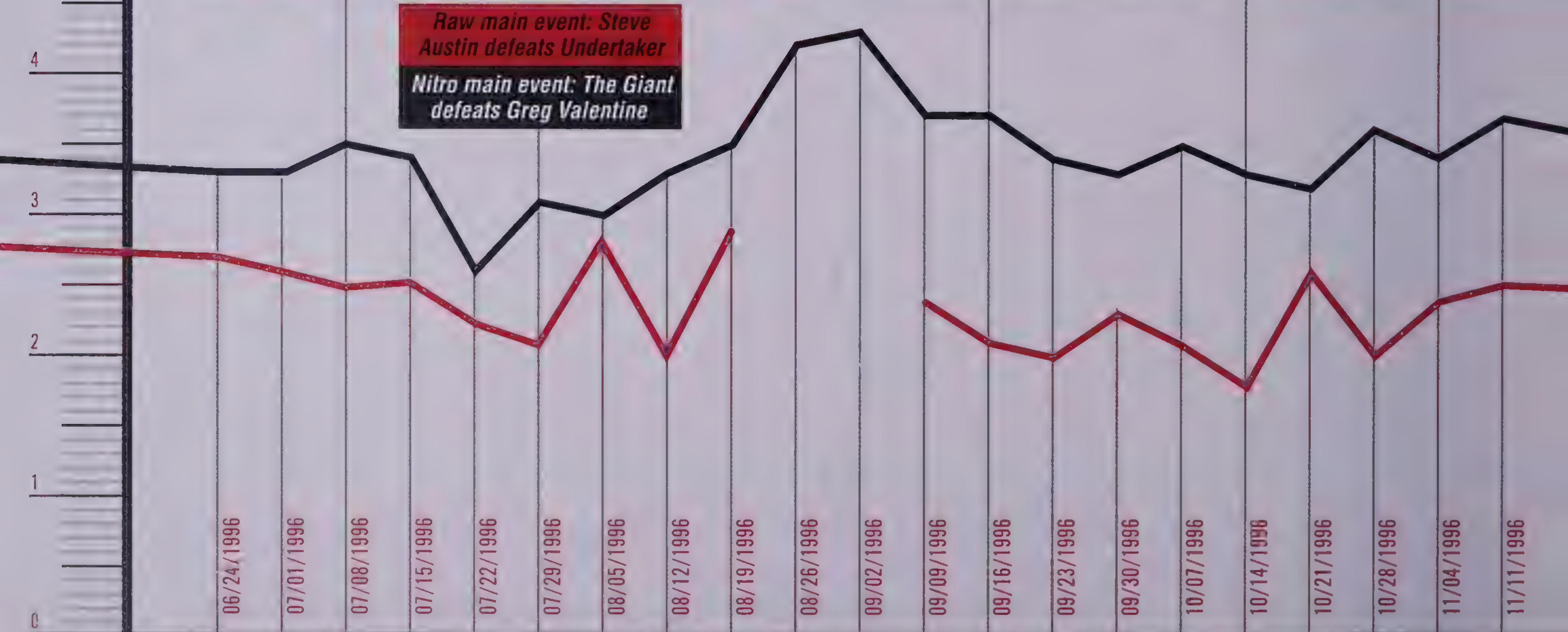


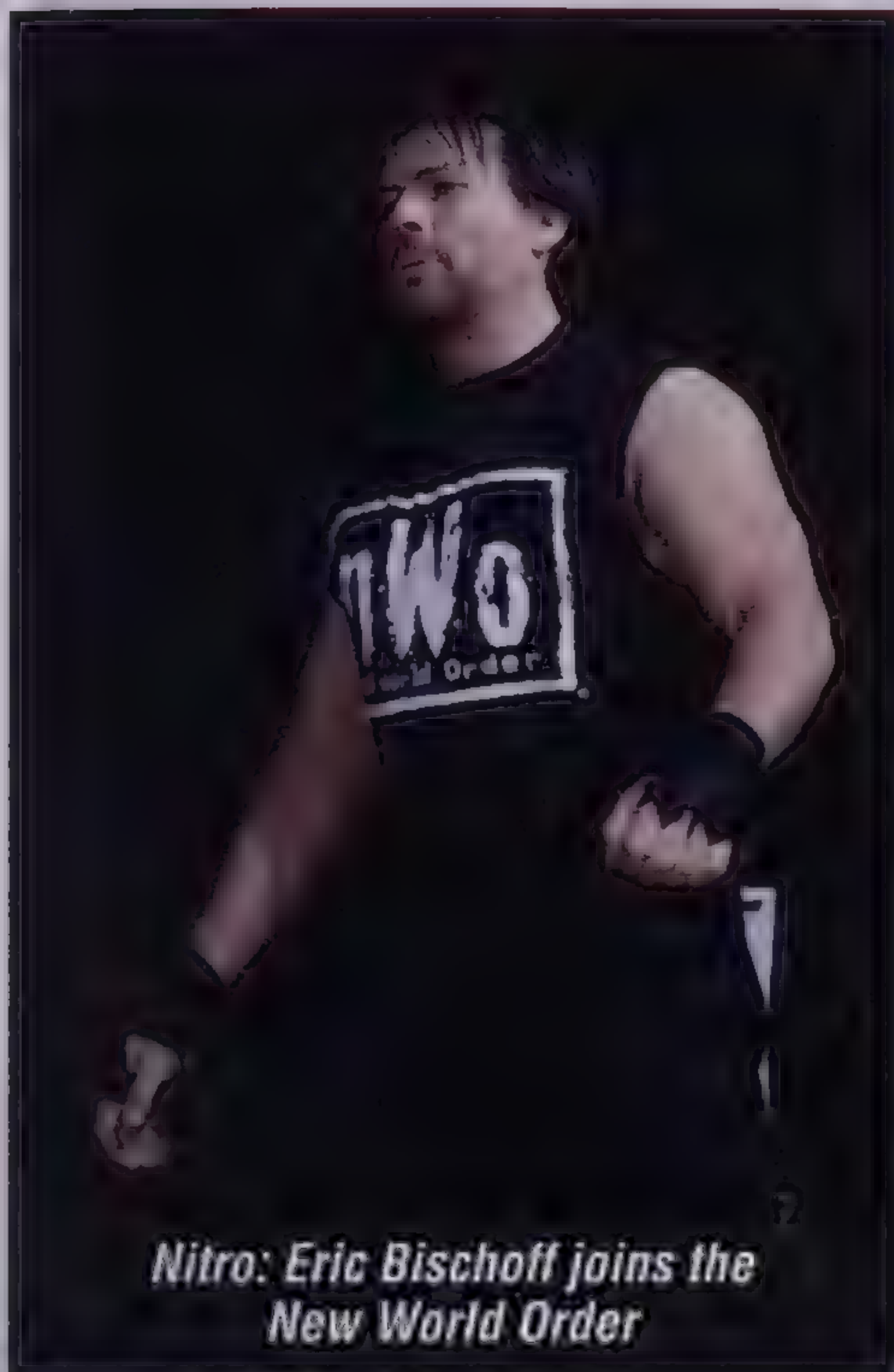
Nitro: Syxx (Sean Waltman) joins the New World Order



Raw: Brian Pillman pulls a

Raw main event: Steve Austin defeats Undertaker
Nitro main event: The Giant defeats Greg Valentine





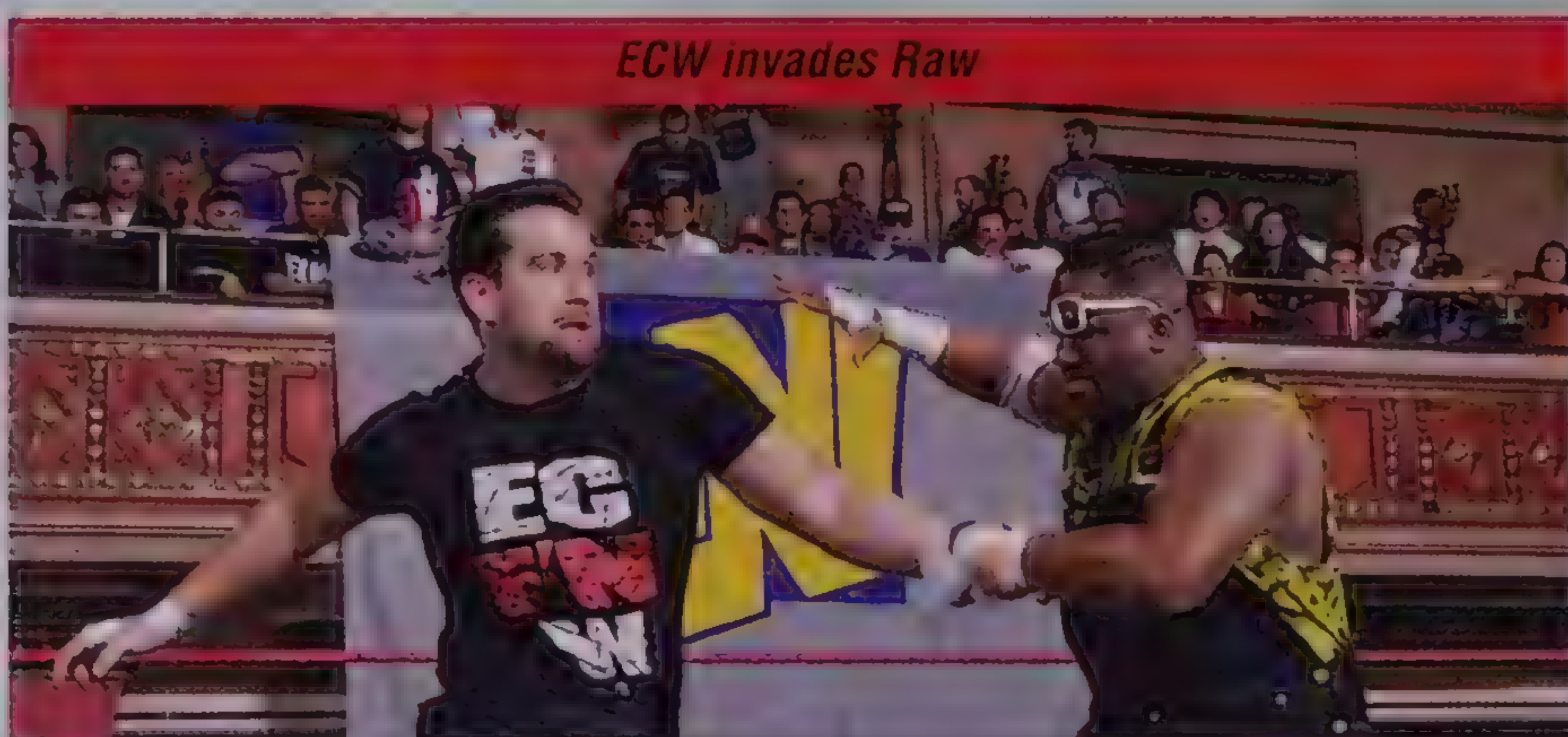
Nitro: Eric Bischoff joins the New World Order



Nitro: Sting descends from ceiling to help Diamond Dallas Page fend off the New World Order



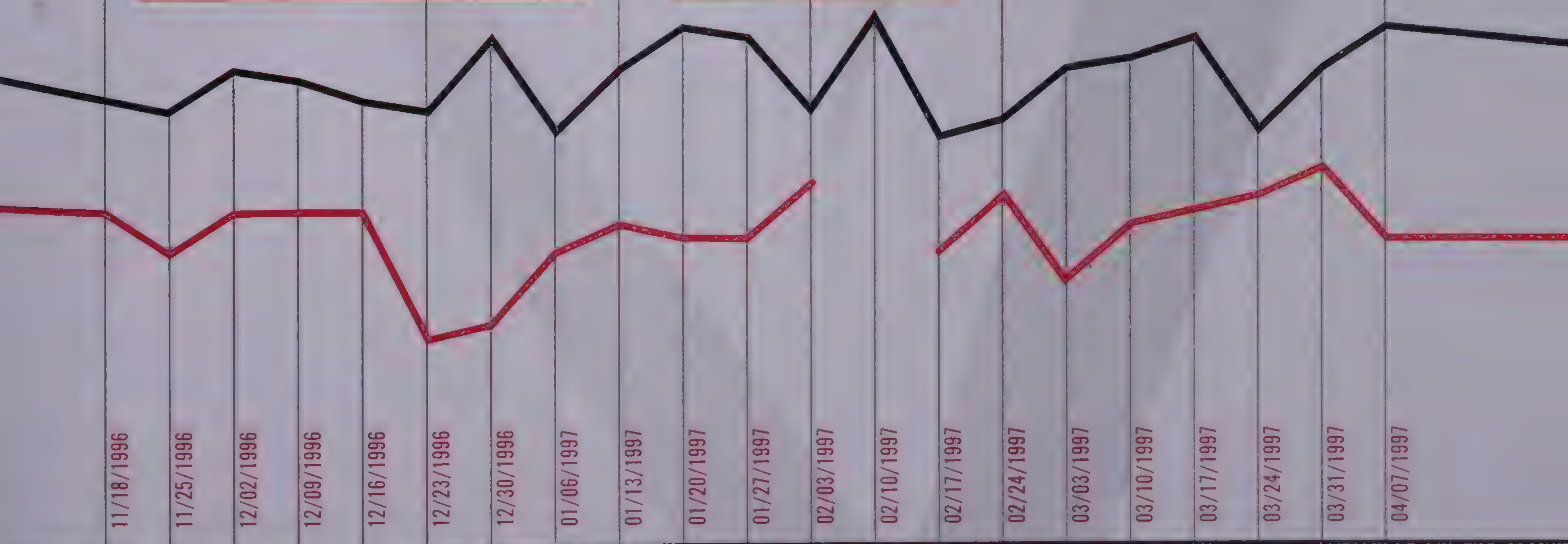
Raw main event: Bret Hart defeats "Fake" Razor Ramon



ECW invades Raw

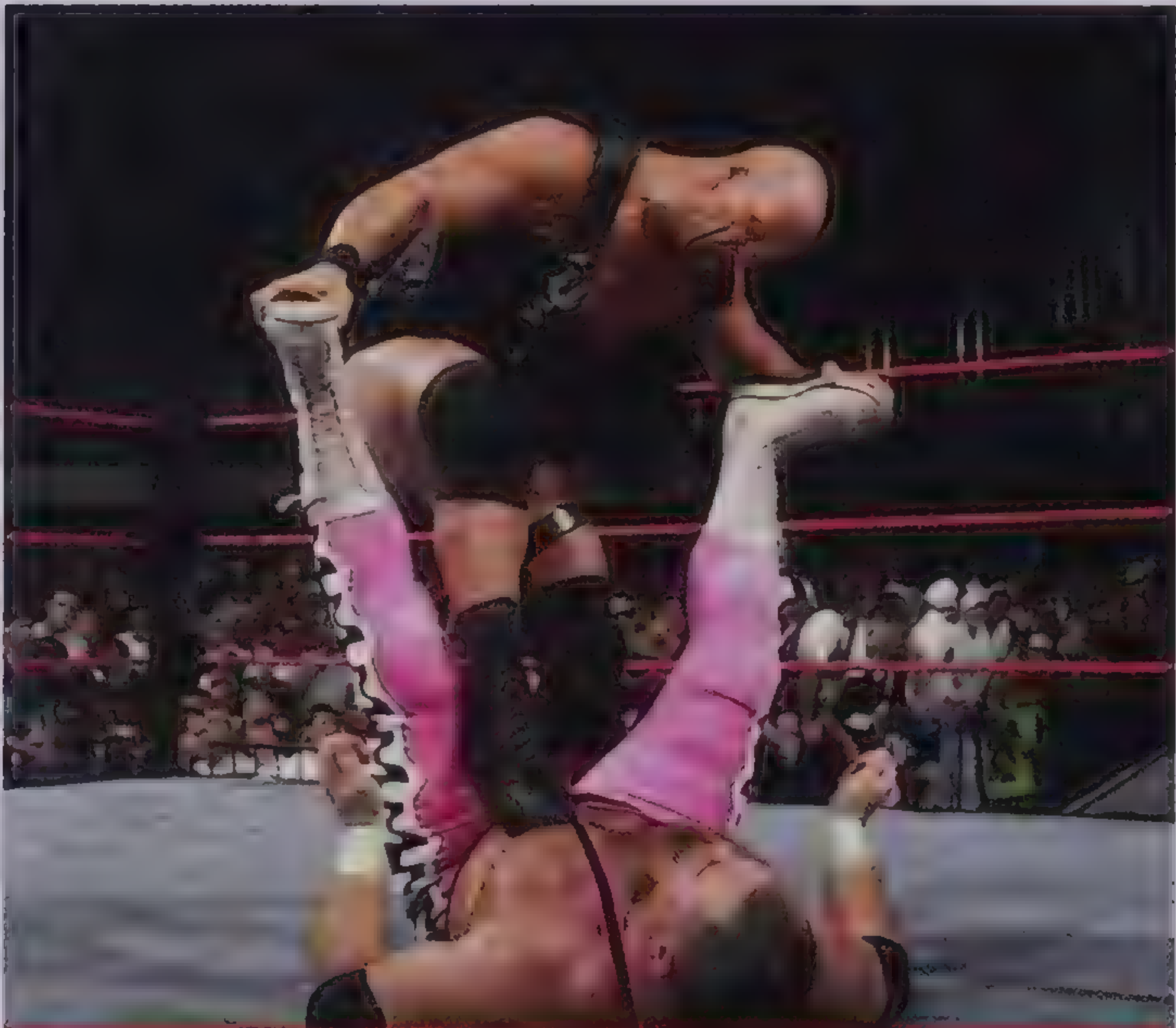
Nitro: Diamond Dallas Page rejects an offer to join the New World Order

Raw expands to two hours





Raw main event: Hart Foundation defeats Steve Austin, Dude Love, and Undertaker in a Flag Match



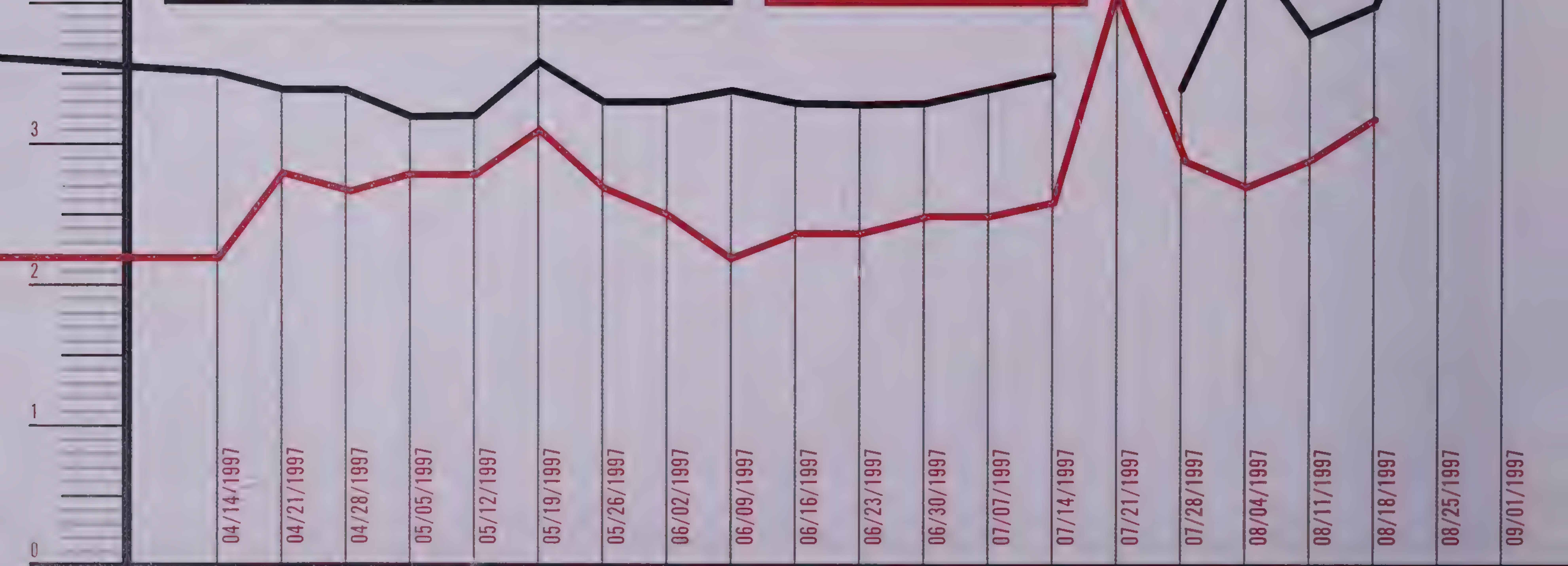
Raw main event: Steve Austin defeats Jim Neidhart by DQ

Nitro main event: Ric Flair defeats Syxx by DQ



Raw: Dude Love makes his debut

Nitro: Lex Luger defeats Hulk Hogan for the WCW Championship



Raw: Steve Austin slams Vince McMahon



Raw: Steve Austin confronts Mike Tyson



Raw main event: Owen Hart defeats WWE Champion Shawn Michaels via DQ

Nitro main event: Sting vs. Hulk Hogan (no contest)

Rick Rude appears on both Raw and Nitro

Nitro: Eddie Guerrero defeats Chris Benoit; Curt Hennig defeats Dean Malenko; Lex Luger defeats Booker T; Scott Hall defeats Scott Steiner

Raw: Steve Austin throws the Intercontinental Championship over a bridge

Nitro: Bret Hart debuts with WCW



Raw breaks Nitro's ratings winning streak; Raw main event: WWE Champion Steve Austin vs. Mr. McMahon (no contest)

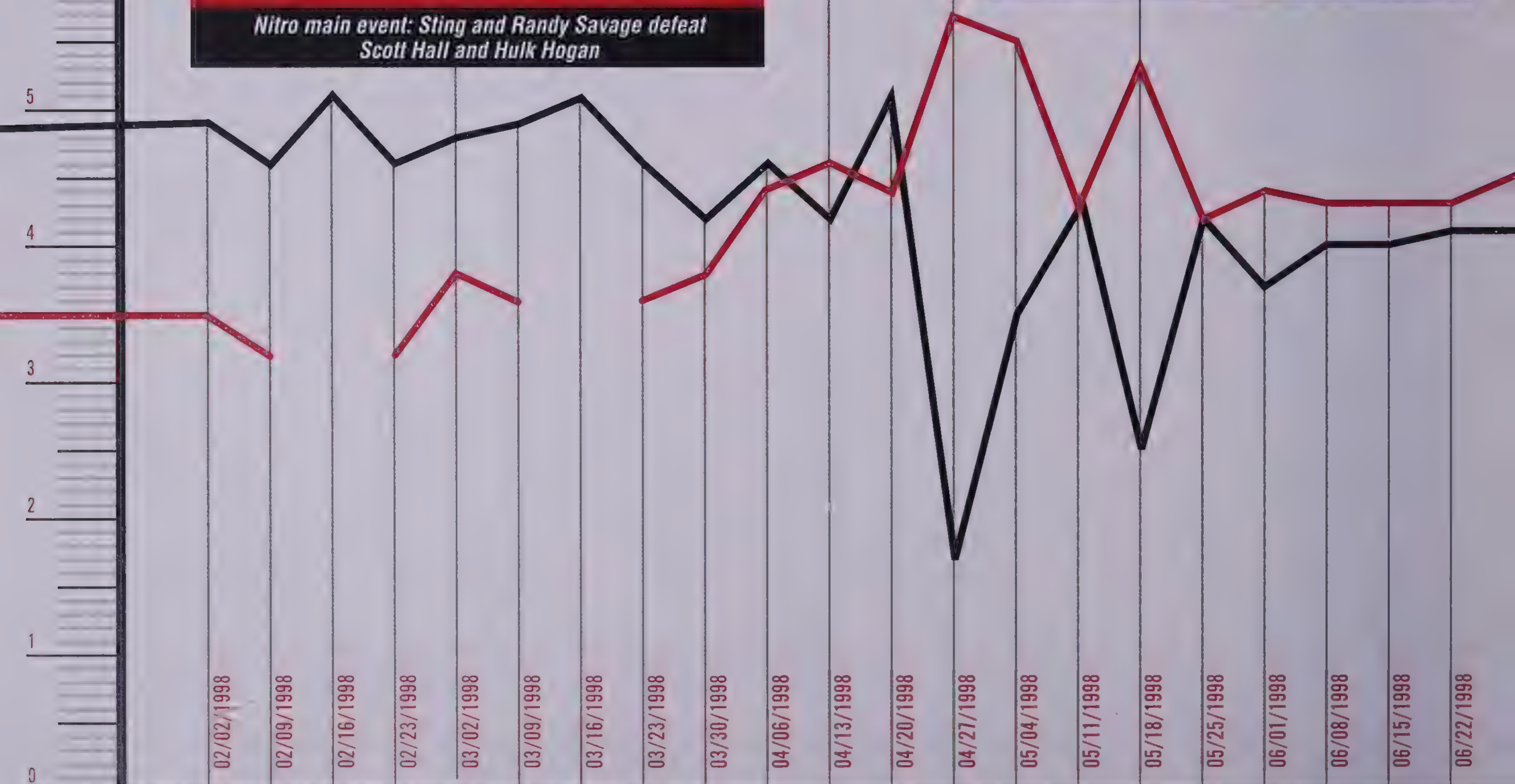
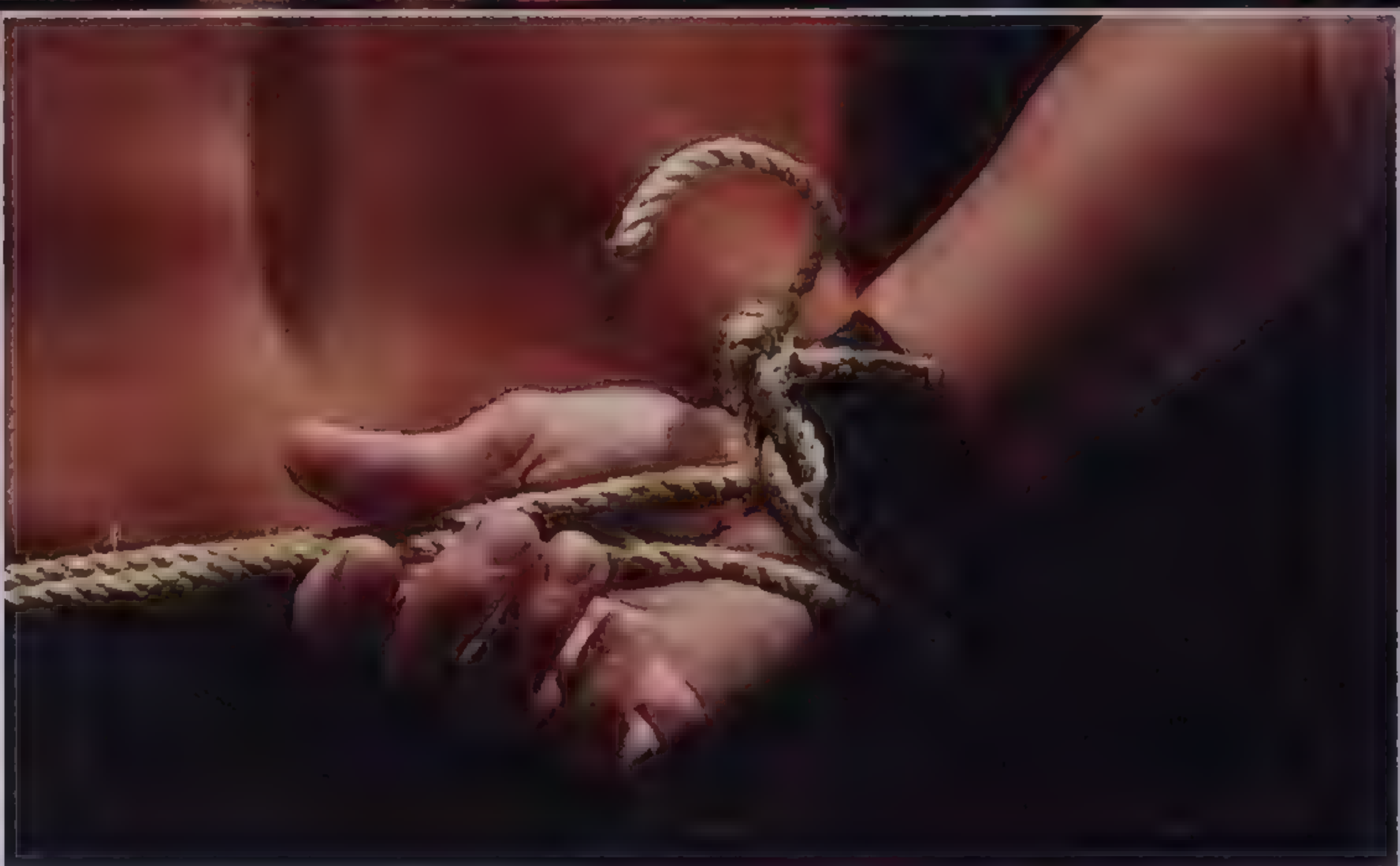


Raw: DX invades Nitro

Raw main event: WWE Champion Steve Austin vs. Pat Patterson and Gerald Brisco (no contest)



Raw main event: Steve Austin vs. Kane (no contest)
Nitro main event: Sting and Randy Savage defeat Scott Hall and Hulk Hogan



Nitro main event: Goldberg defeats Hulk Hogan for the WCW Championship



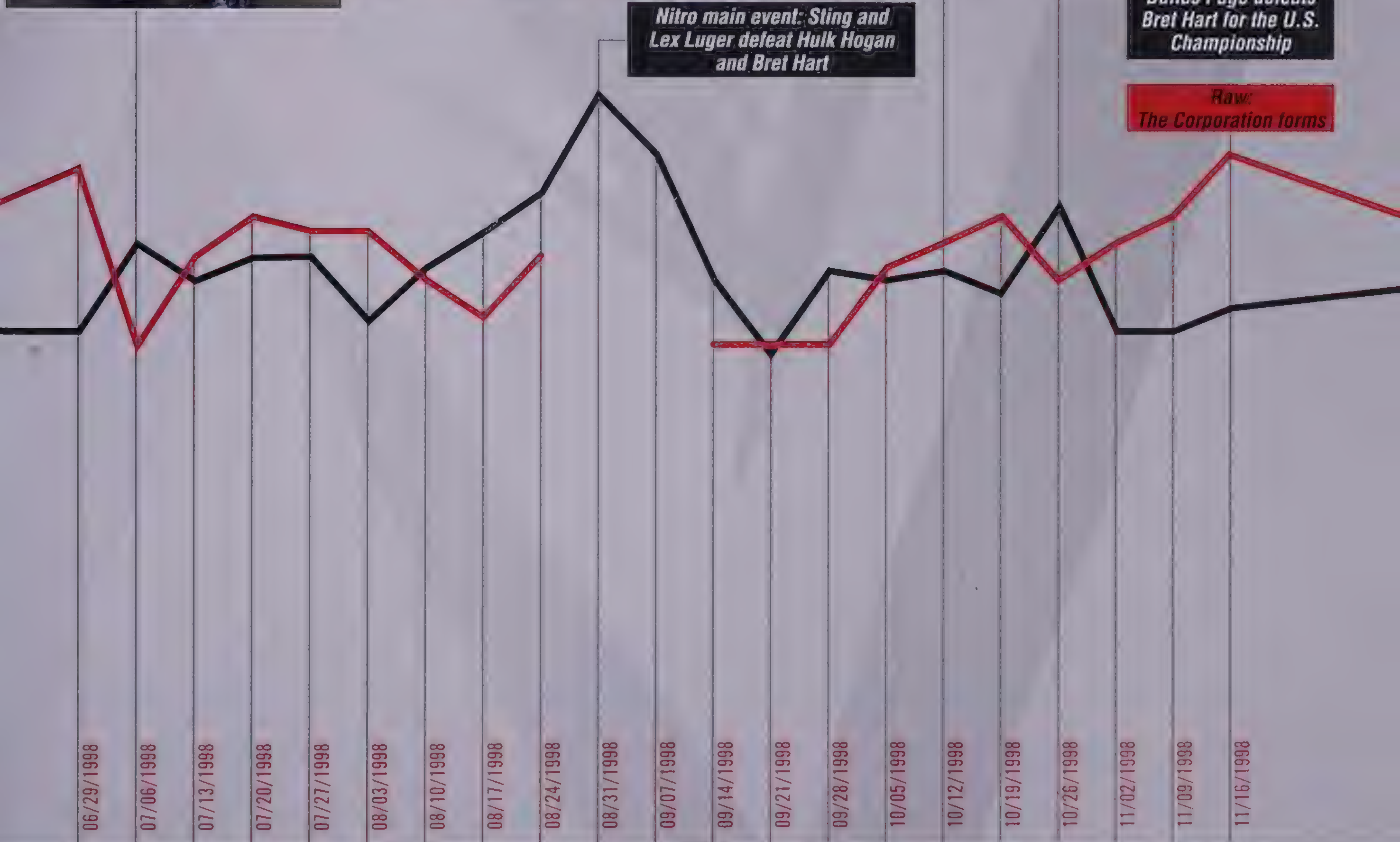
Nitro main event: Sting and Lex Luger defeat Hulk Hogan and Bret Hart



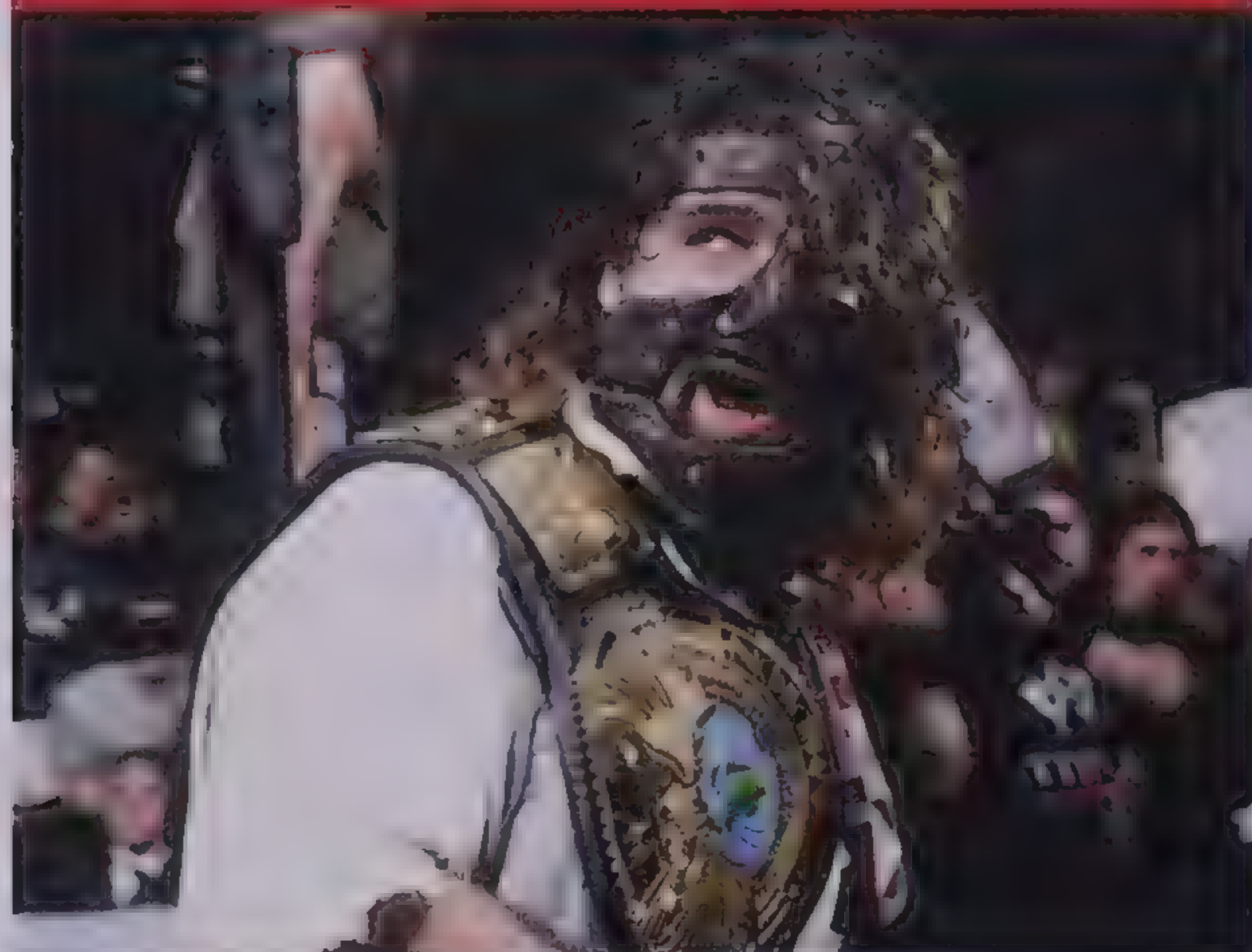
Raw: Steve Austin fills Mr. McMahon's Corvette with cement

Nitro's final ratings victory; Nitro main event: Diamond Dallas Page defeats Bret Hart for the U.S. Championship

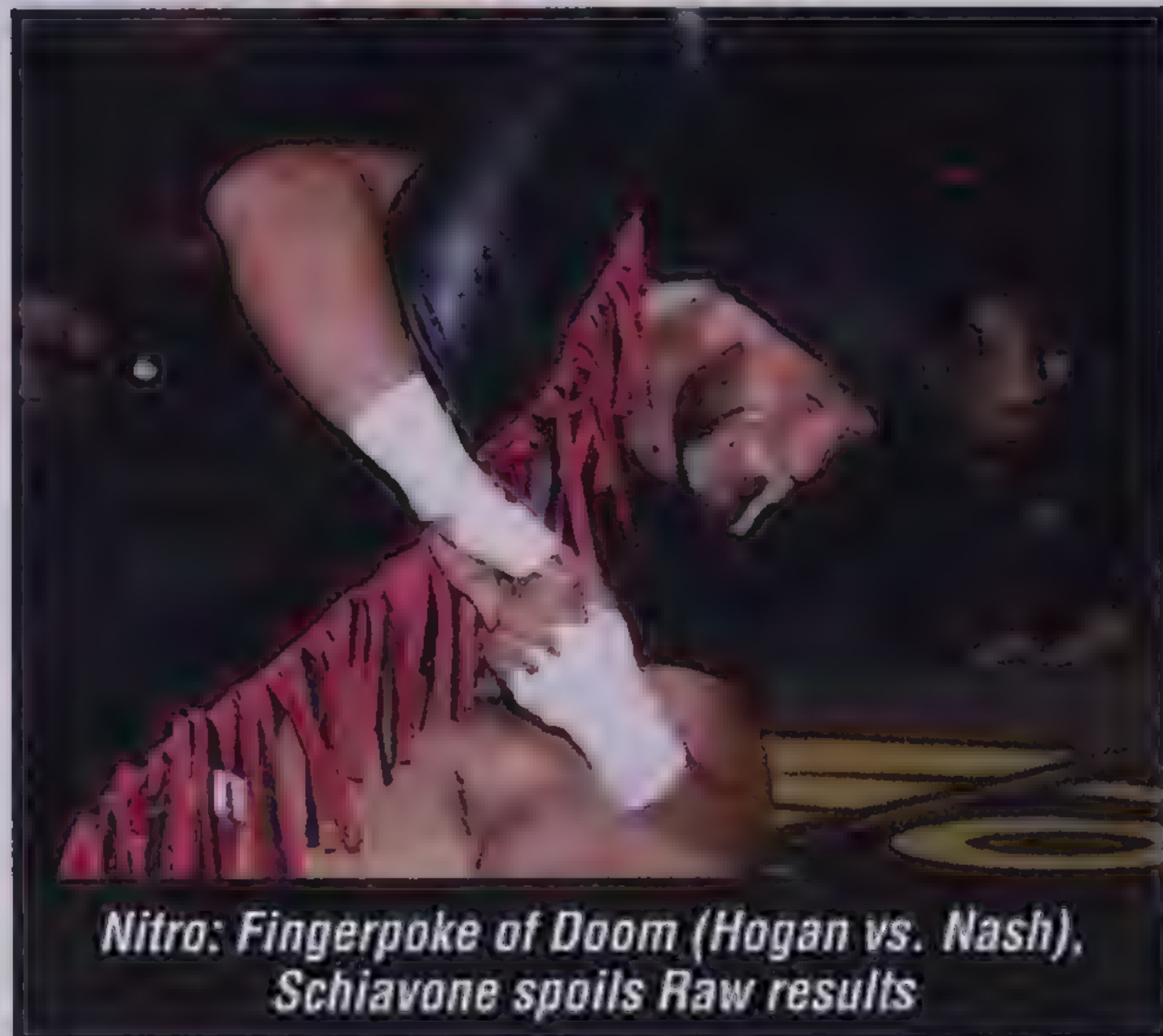
Raw: The Corporation forms



Raw: Mankind wins WWE Title

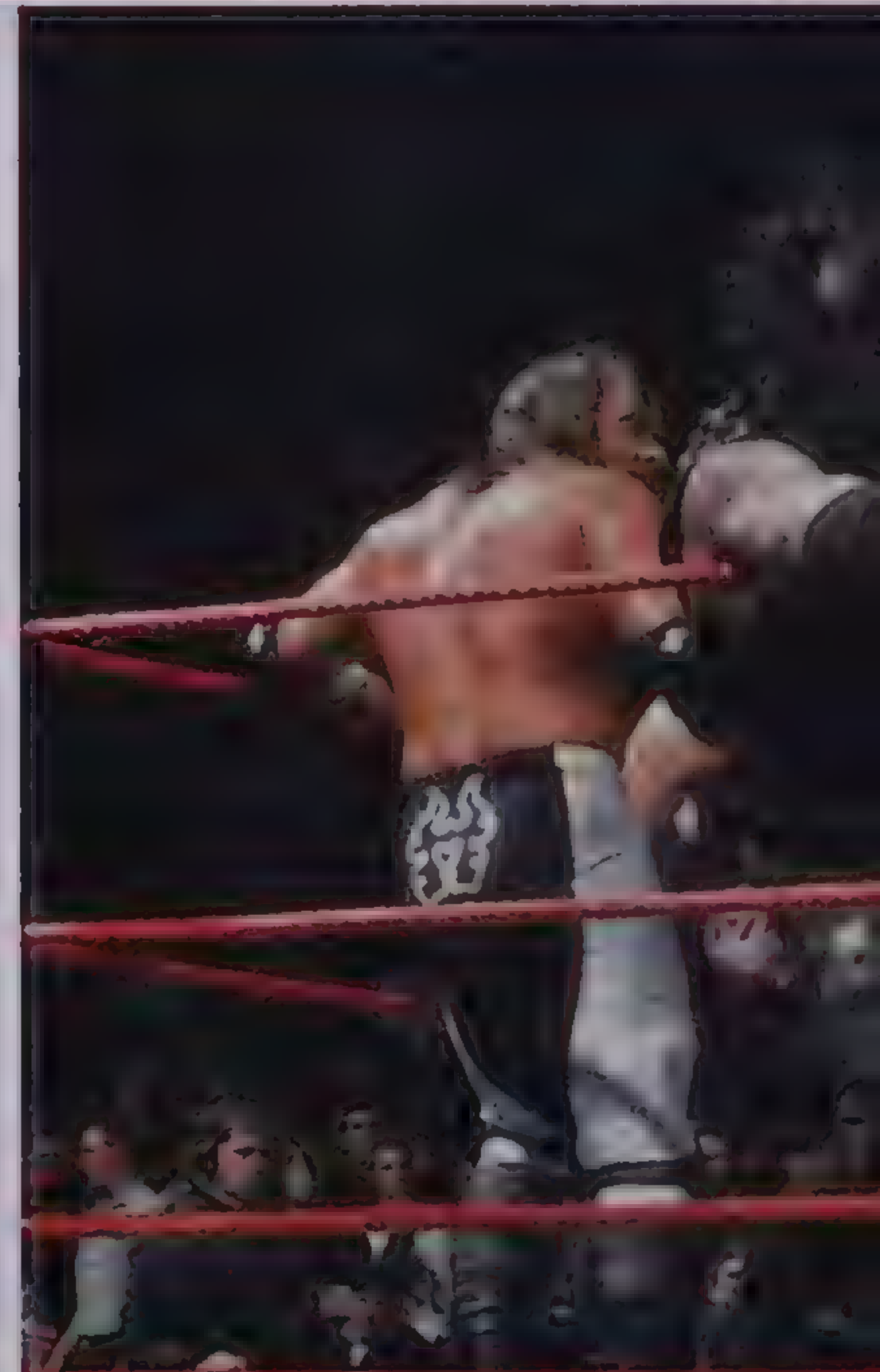


Nitro: Scott Steiner defeats Chris Jericho

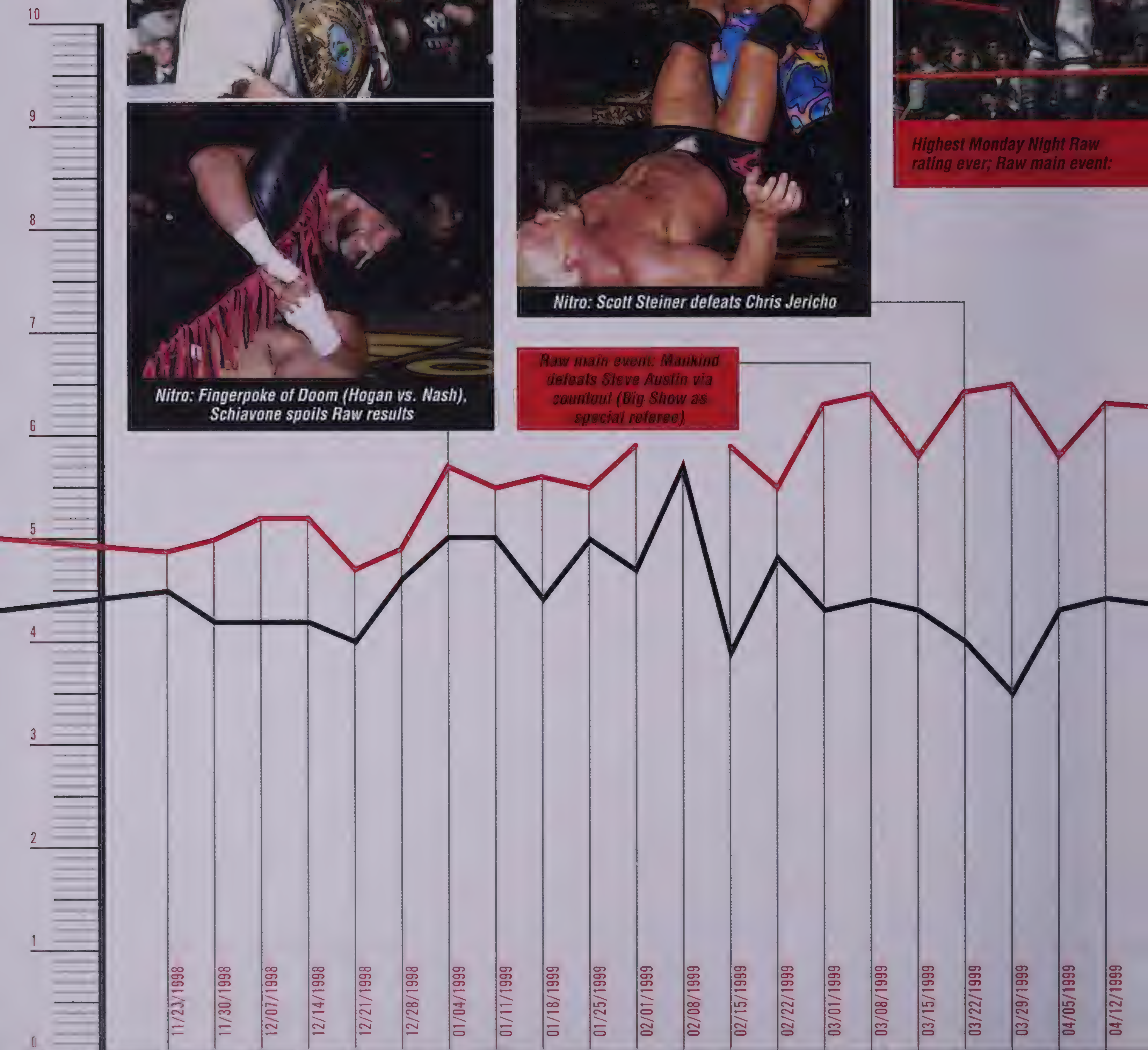


Nitro: Fingerpoke of Doom (Hogan vs. Nash), Schiavone spoils Raw results

Highest Monday Night Raw rating ever; Raw main event:



Raw main event: Mankind defeats Steve Austin via countout (Big Show as special referee)





Steve Austin, Mr. McMahon, and The Rock defeat Triple H, Shane McMahon, and Undertaker



Raw: Owen Hart tribute show

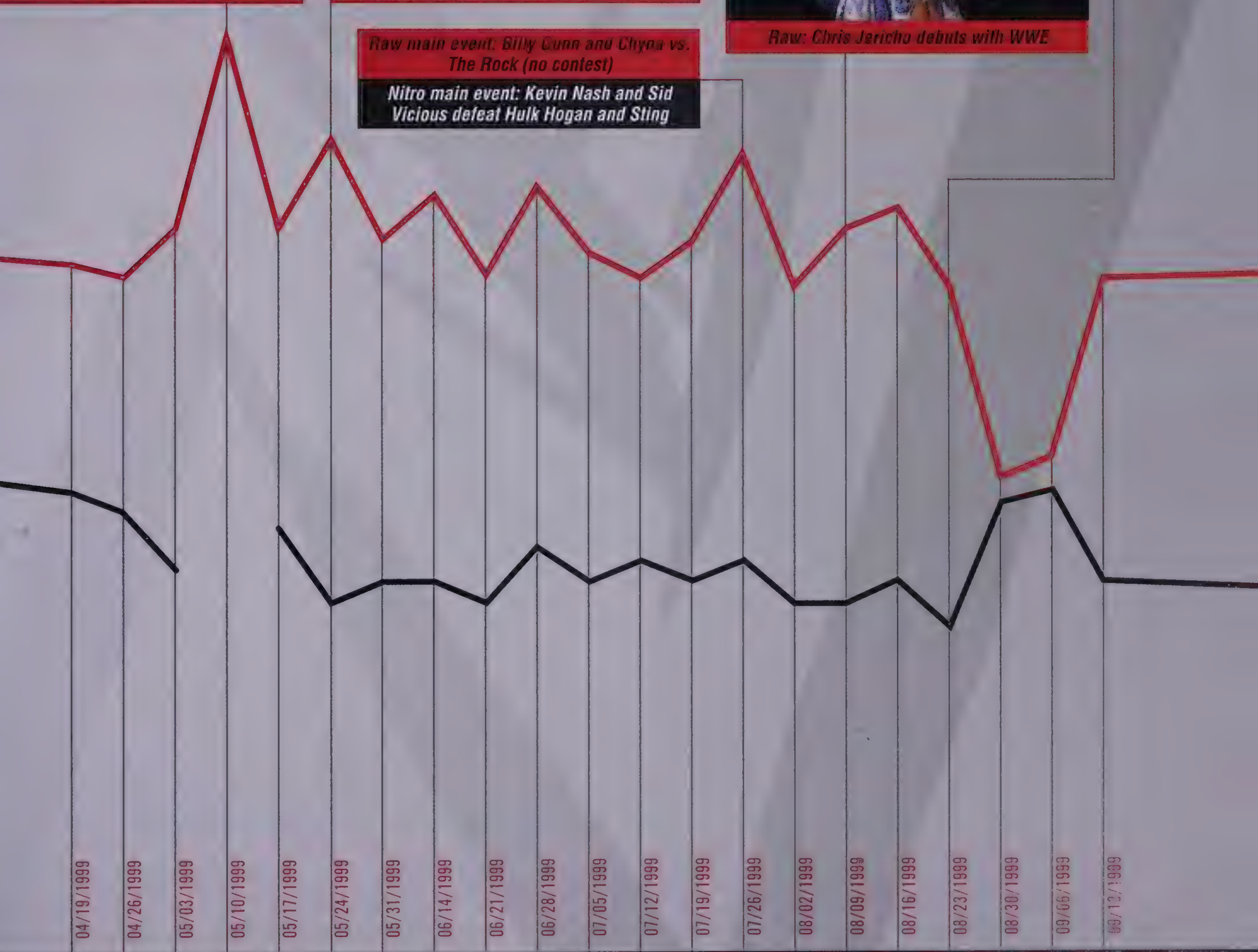
Raw main event: Triple H defeats Mankind to win the WWE Championship (Shane McMahon as special referee)



Raw: Chris Jericho debuts with WWE

Raw main event: Billy Gunn and Chyna vs. The Rock (no contest)

Nitro main event: Kevin Nash and Sid Vicious defeat Hulk Hogan and Sting



Raw: "This Is Your Life," Rock

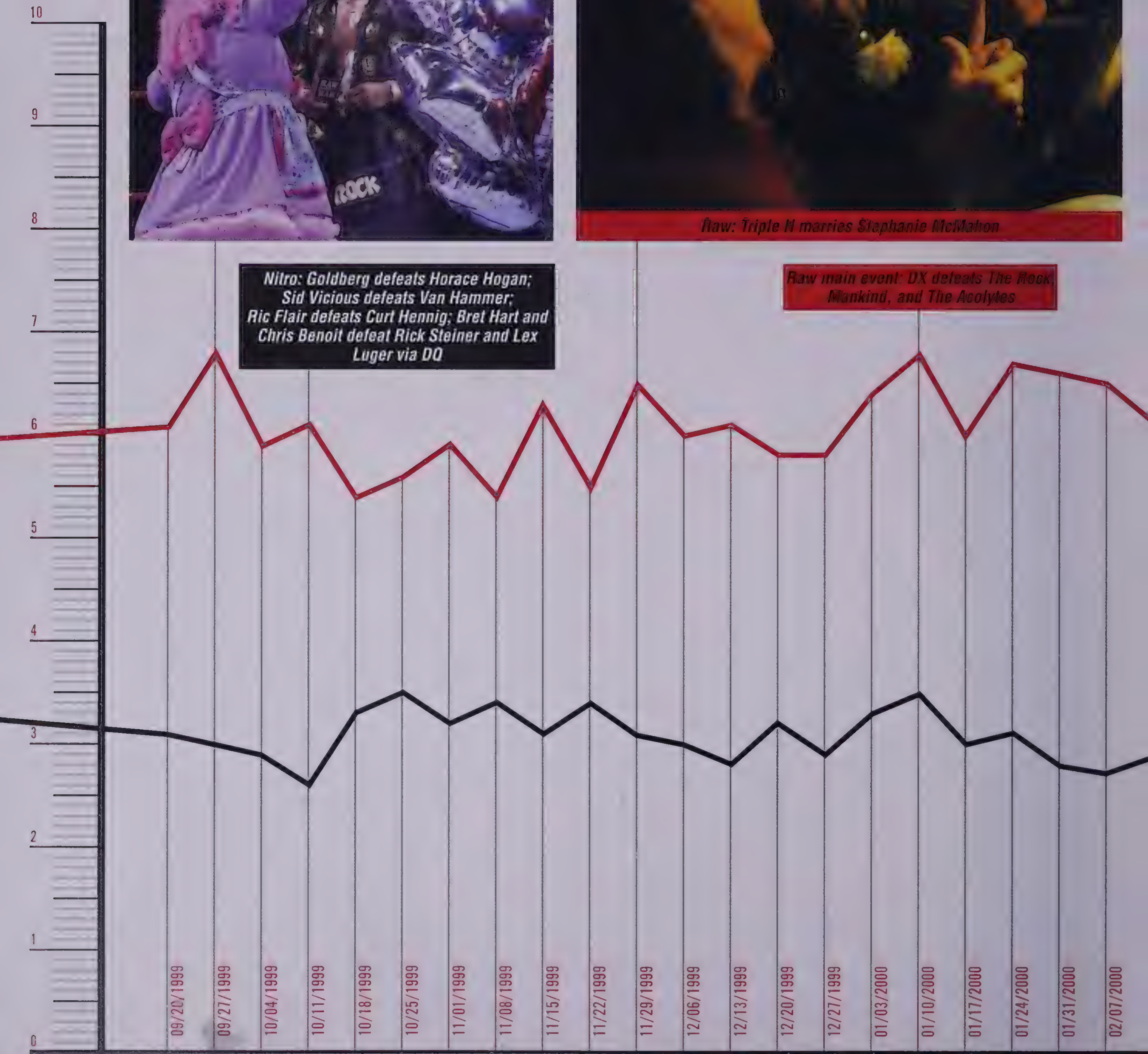


Raw: Triple H marries Stephanie McMahon



Nitro: Goldberg defeats Horace Hogan;
Sid Vicious defeats Van Hammer;
Ric Flair defeats Curt Hennig; Bret Hart and
Chris Benoit defeat Rick Steiner and Lex
Luger via DQ

Raw main event: DX defeats The Rock,
Mankind, and The Acolytes





Raw main event: The Rock defeats Triple H and Big Show via DQ



Raw main event: WWE Champion The Rock defeats Shane McMahon in a Steel Cage Match (Gerald Brisco and Pat Patterson as special referees)

Nitro main event: WCW Champion Sid Vicious defeats Tank Abbott



Nitro: Vince Russo and Eric Bischoff vacate all WCW championships

Raw main event: Perry Saturn and Dean Malenko defeat Essa Rios and Godfather

Nitro: Vince Russo strips Ric Flair of the WCW Championship, awards it to Jeff Jarrett

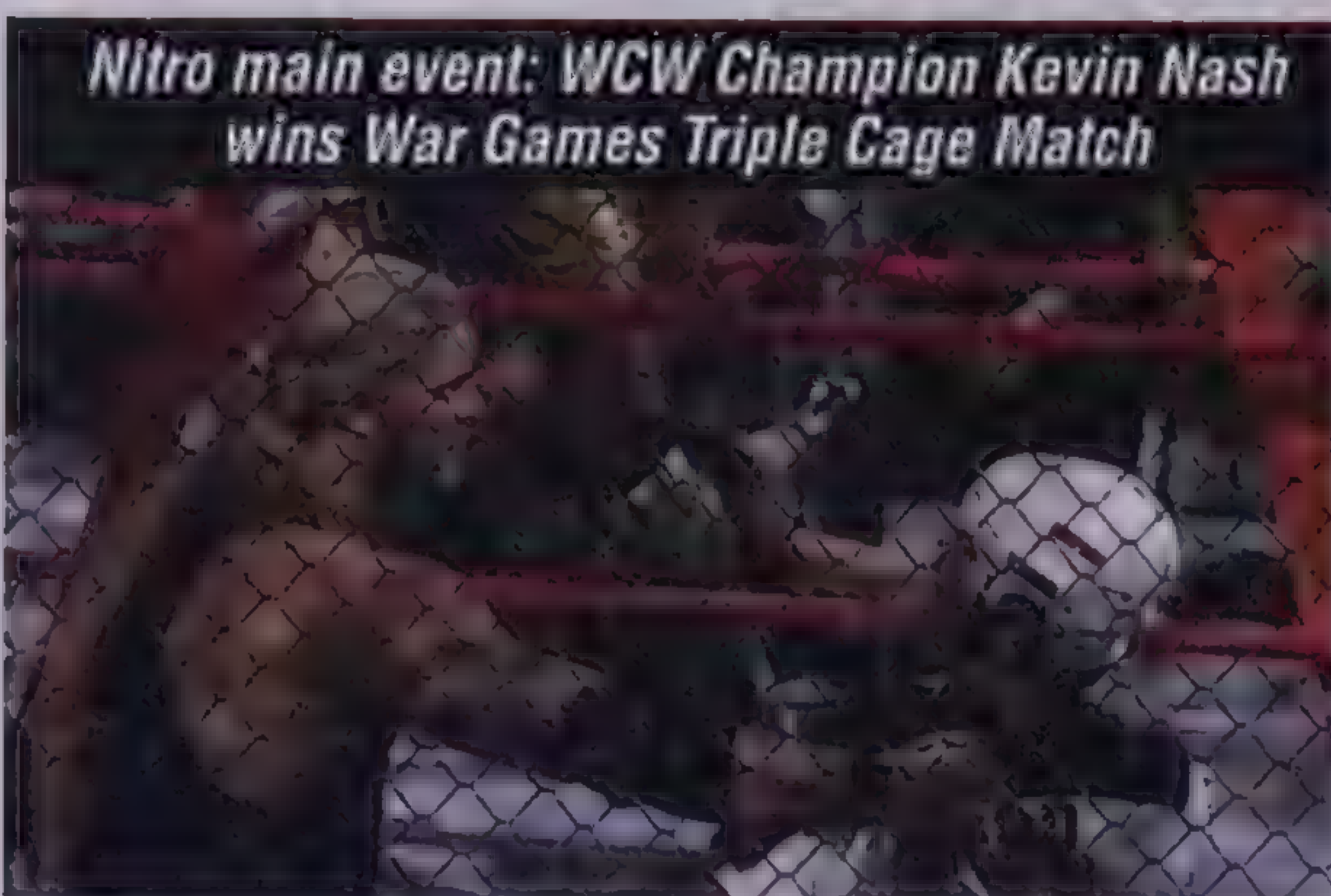


Raw main event: Lita and The Rock defeat Trish Stratus and Triple H



Nitro main event: Scott Steiner defeats Mike Awesome

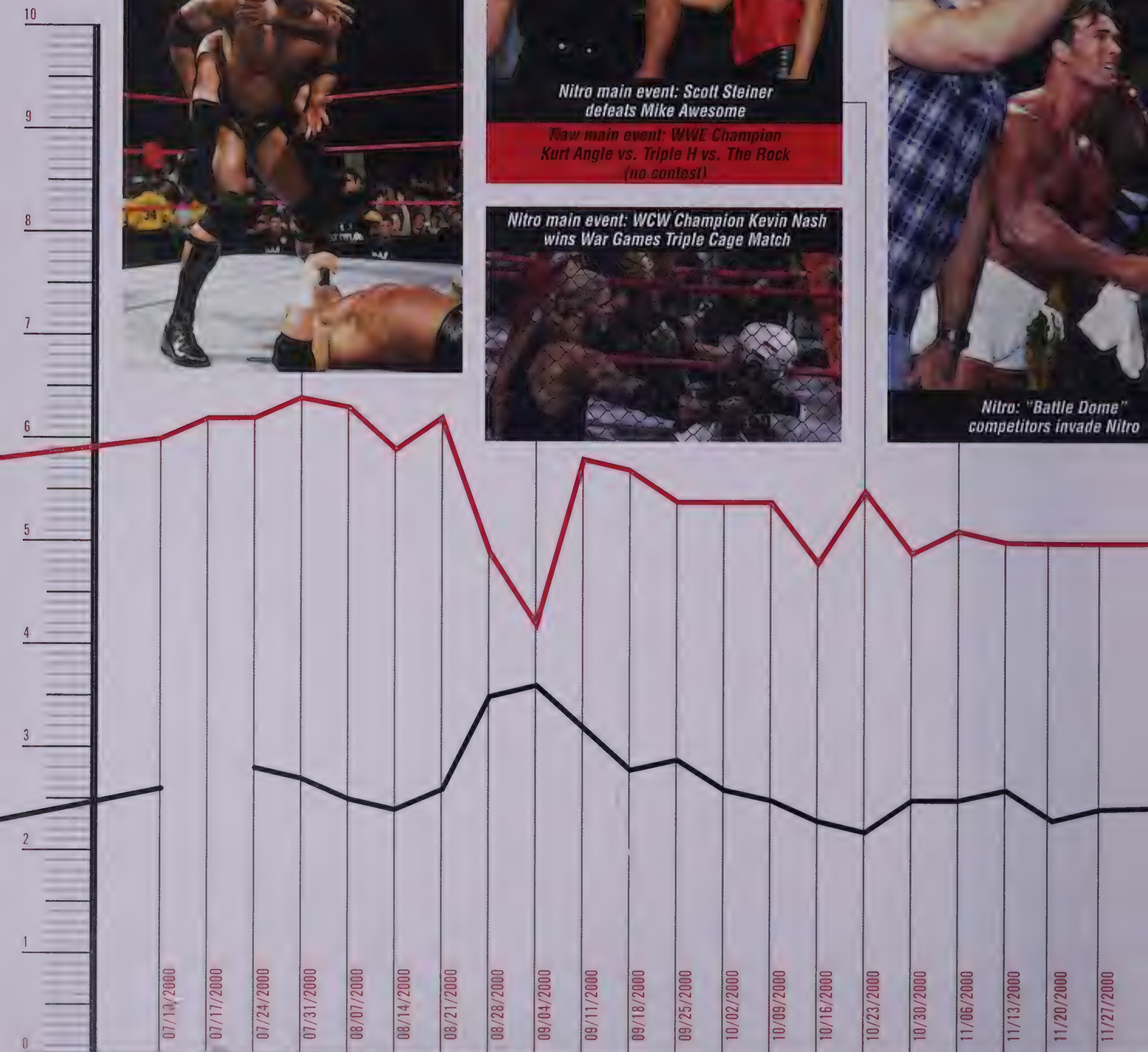
Raw main event: WWE Champion Kurt Angle vs. Triple H vs. The Rock (no contest)



Nitro main event: WCW Champion Kevin Nash wins War Games Triple Cage Match



Nitro: "Battle Dome" competitors invade Nitro

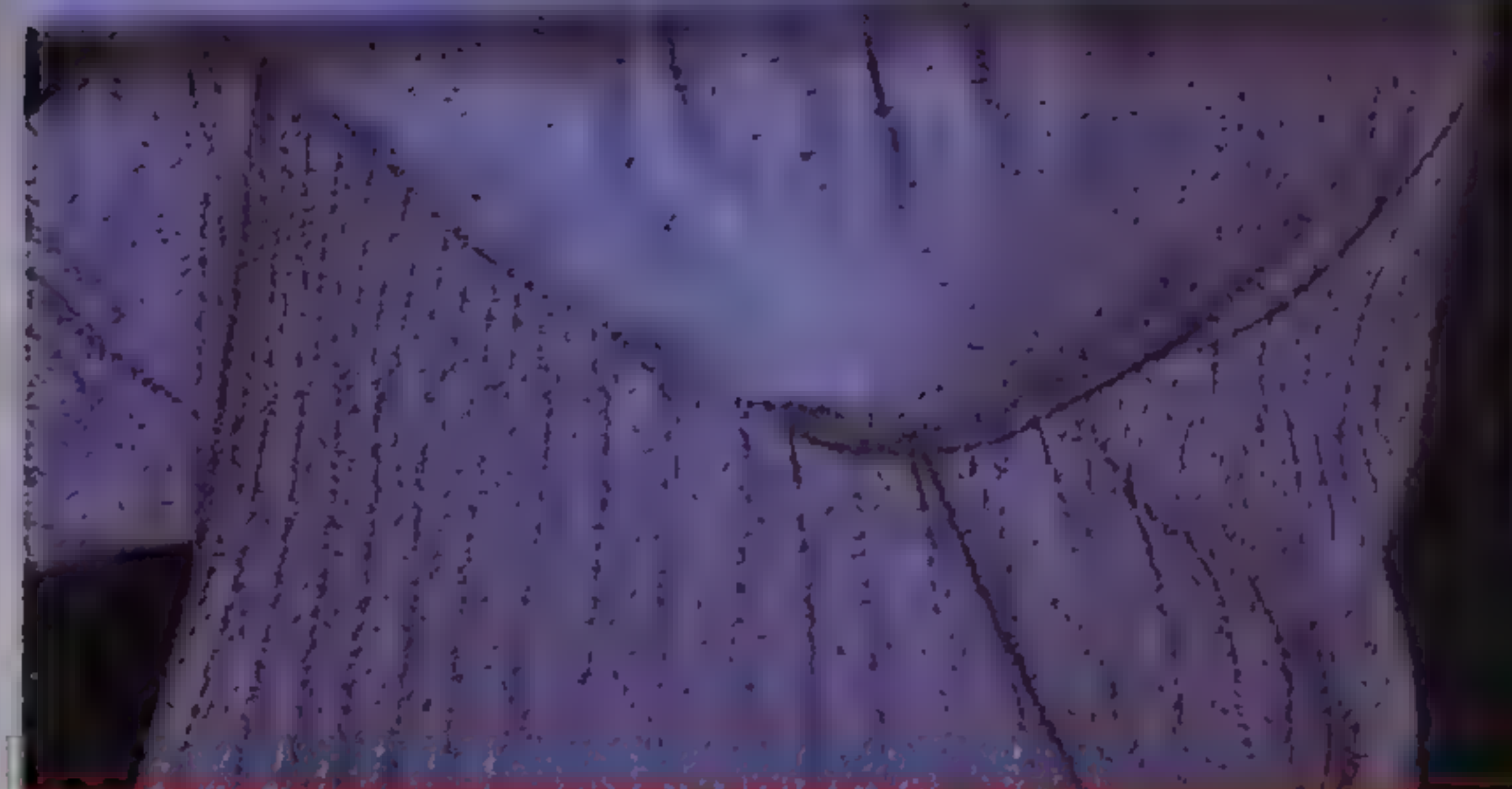




Nitro main event:
WCW Champion Scott Steiner
defeats Jeff Jarrett



Nitro main event: Lance Storm and Mike Awesome
defeat WCW Tag Team Champions Chuck Palumbo
and Sean O'Haire in a non-title match



Raw/Nitro simulcast



THE ATTITUDE ERA

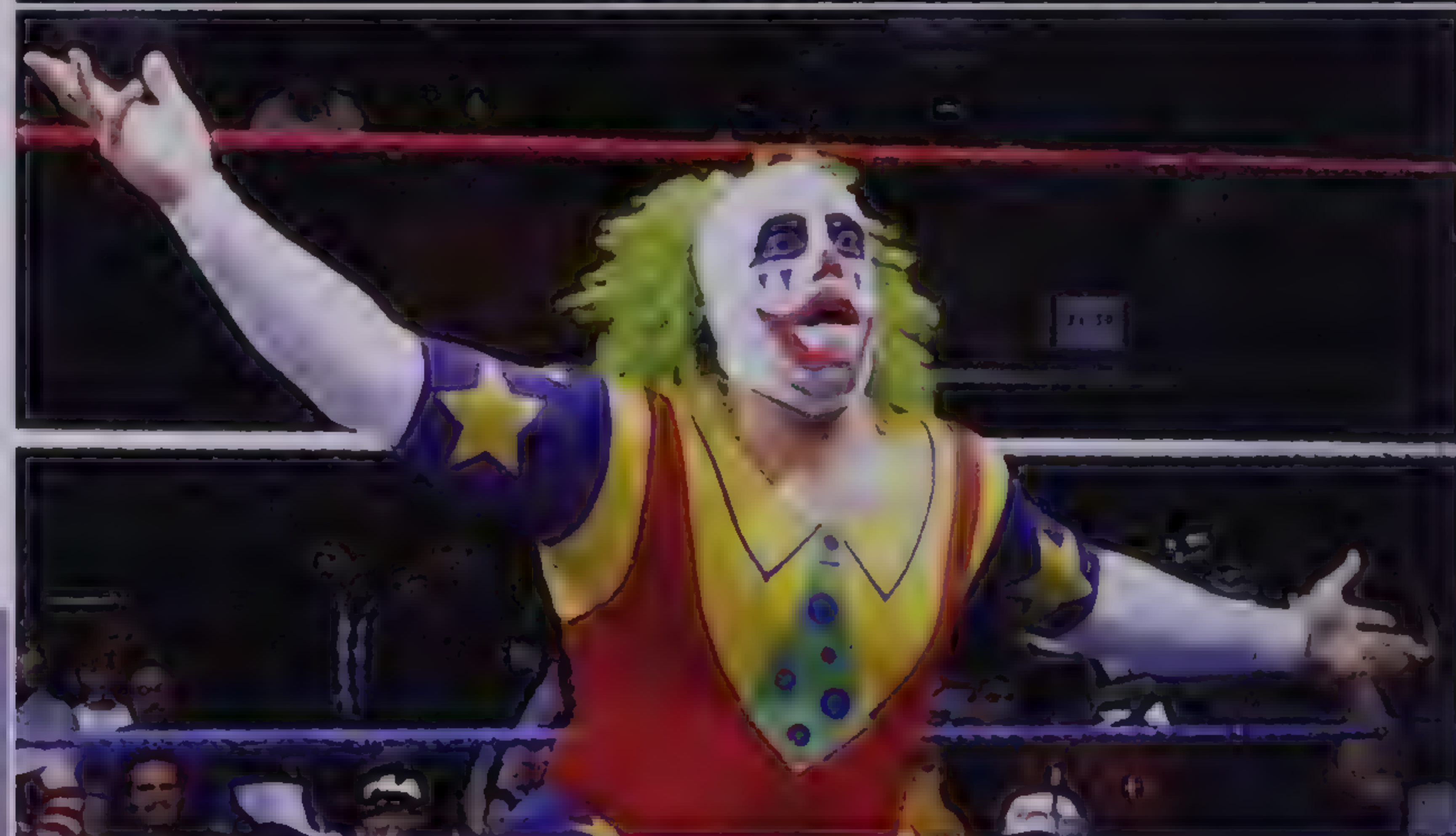
MAKING A CHANGE

By mid-1996, WCW had already embarked on their epic thrashing of WWE in the Monday night ratings war. Thanks in large part to the edginess of the New World Order, *Nitro*'s ratings consistently reached the mid-to-high threes, while WWE's *Raw* hovered around two, and on occasion, even dipped into the ones. It was becoming painfully clear to those within WWE that a change needed to be made. No longer were cartoon-like characters such as Duke "The Dumpster" Droese, Doink the Clown, and the Godwinns acceptable to fans, especially when WCW was featuring the likes of the defiant Kevin Nash, Scott Hall, and Hulk Hogan.

WCW/New World Order members Kevin Nash, Scott Hall, and Hulk Hogan



Doink the Clown



"Shawn [Michaels] and I used to discuss it privately," recalls Triple H. "We really felt like the business needed to change. Business was down and it felt like there was a point where we were insulting people's intelligence a little bit, and giving them a product that was passé. The era of Doink the Clown was over."

The WWE product eventually began to show signs of change in 1997. Among the first Superstars to exhibit a more attitudinal approach were Shawn Michaels and Triple H. Michaels' most recent history was spent as the traditional, overly-smiley good guy with little-to-no edge. Meanwhile, Triple H was portraying an arrogant, rich snob from the affluent community of Greenwich, Connecticut. Both Superstars possessed astonishing in-ring skills, but neither had personas that resonated with the evolving sports-entertainment fan of the late 1990s. Troubled with their characters and the general staleness of the overall WWE product, Michaels and Triple H pleaded with Vince McMahon to let them team up and evolve their on-screen characters into the brash personalities that came natural to them. McMahon eventually acquiesced. The result: D-Generation X, one of the most controversial factions in sports-entertainment history.

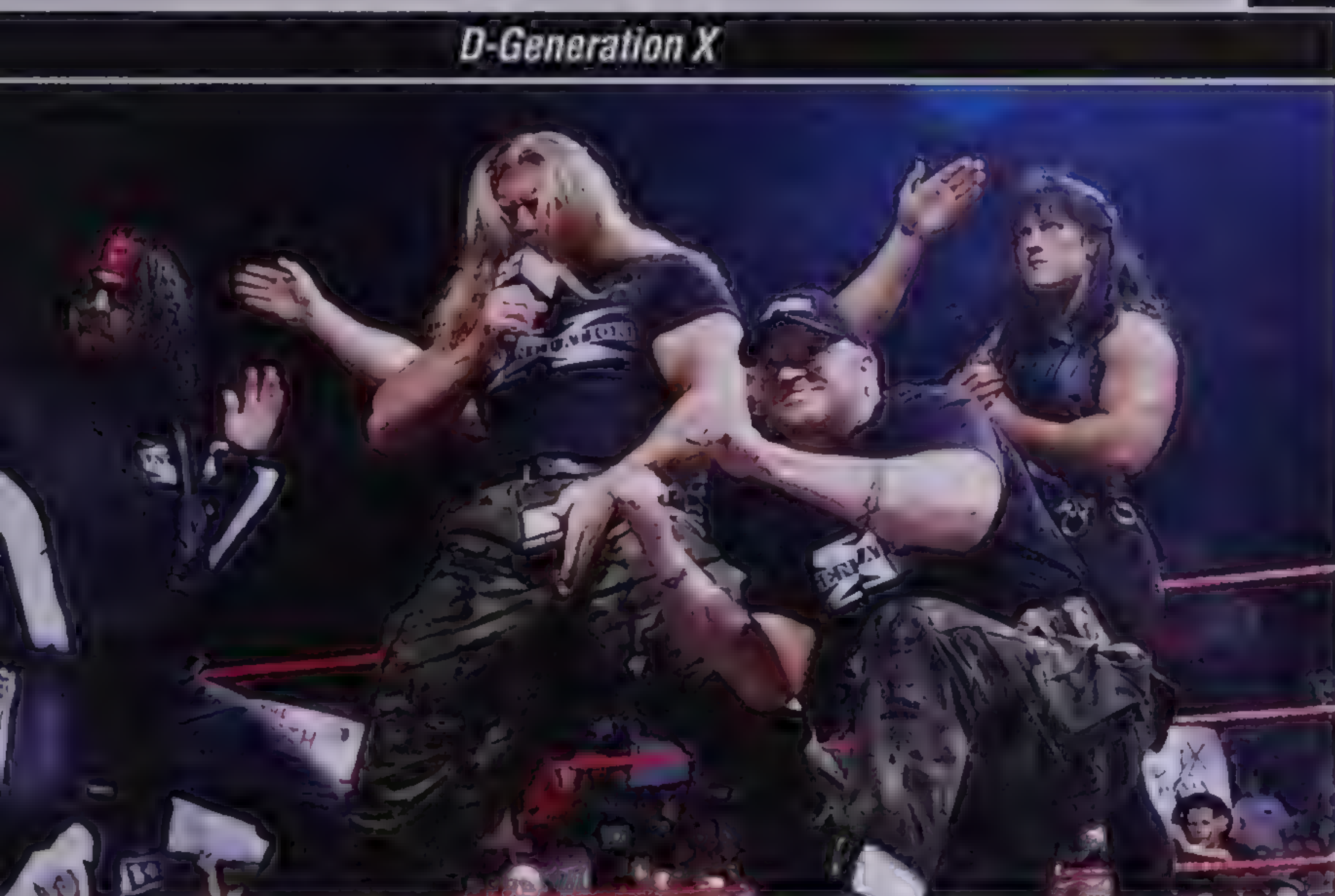
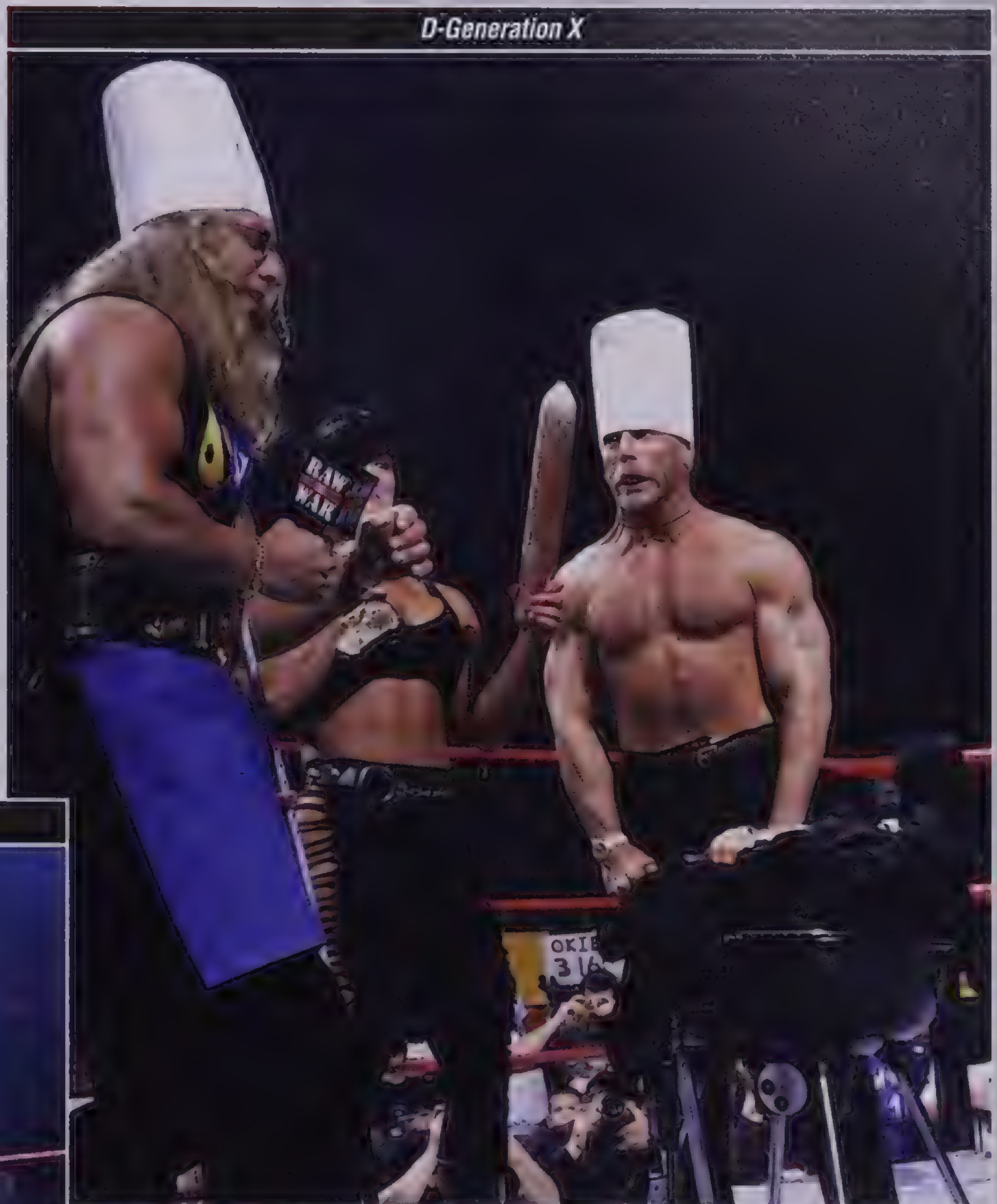
D-Generation X members Shawn Michaels and Triple H



Wedgies, crotch chops, sexual innuendos, and questionable language quickly became the norm following DX's formation. The more sophomoric they acted, the more fans loved them. And the more the fans cheered for DX, the more rebellious they became. It was like a runaway train engulfed in flames. DX was an unstoppable force that was running hotter than anything else WWE had seen in years.

"When we finally got the green light to go ahead, we almost felt like, 'What do we have to lose? Let's go all out,'" says Triple H. "Everybody hated it when we first started. The talent was mad; the agents were mad; Vince was mad. We were getting yelled at and threatened. USA was mad; they were sending us letters all the time, telling us to stop doing what we were doing." D-Generation X even infamously read one of the network's letters of complaint on air, resulting in huge ratings.

"The one group it didn't seem to be bothering was the fans," continues Triple H. "Whether they hated us or loved us, the more we did it, the bigger reactions we got. So we knew we were on to something. We knew if the numbers were up and we were getting a reaction, Vince wasn't going to pull the plug."



And the numbers were up. In fact, *Raw* ratings from October and November 1997 were up 28 percent versus the same time the prior year. *Nitro* was still winning the war, but it was becoming clear that *Raw*, which was slowly morphing into an edgier product, was about to explode in popularity.

Many of the edgiest moments of 1997 were produced from DX's rivalry with the Hart Foundation. While warring over Bret Hart's WWE Championship, HBK regularly disgraced the Canadian flag, using it to blow his nose and wipe his nether regions. He even went so far as to simulate obscene sexual acts on top of the flag from inside the ring. But perhaps worst of all was Michaels accusing Hart of being a member of the white supremacist group the Ku Klux Klan. The smiley-faced, fan-hugging, and Kliq Cam-carrying HBK of 1996 was quickly becoming a distant memory.

While Michaels and Hart battled it out in front of the cameras, the behind-the-scenes relationship between WWE and Hart was quickly reaching an impasse. Earlier in the year, Vince McMahon had inked Hart to a deal that owed the Hit Man a whopping \$10.5 million over the course of the next twenty years ⁽¹⁾.

(1) Sullivan, K. (2010). *The WWE Championship: A Look Back at the Rich History of the WWE Championship*. New York: Simon & Schuster. Page 152. Hart, B. (2007). *Hitman: My Real Life in the Cartoon World of Wrestling*. New York: Random House Canada. Page 395



"Bret was the last big star that we had left that WCW didn't buy," recalls McMahon. "So I thought, 'you can't let this one go.'"

Shortly after the ink dried on Hart's new contract, McMahon began to have second thoughts. Ultimately, he decided the Hit Man wasn't worth such a lofty monetary compensation, so he urged Hart to see if WCW would offer him a deal. They did: \$7.5 million over three years⁽²⁾.

With Hart heading to WCW, McMahon had to ensure the WWE Championship wound up around the waist of one of his Superstars prior to the Hit Man's final WWE appearance. November's *Survivor Series* match between Hart and Michaels seemed like the logical opportunity. But unfortunately for McMahon, Hart, whose renegotiated contract granted him full creative control over the final thirty days of his term, wanted no part of losing to HBK in his home country of Canada, the site of *Survivor Series*. The creative-control clause was extremely uncommon at the time (and unheard of today), but given WWE's fleeting fear of losing the Hit Man to WCW, the company acquiesced to the unusual demand.

Hart's refusal to lose to Michaels left McMahon with very few options. It was finally decided that during the match, referee Earl Hebner would call for the bell while Michaels had an unsuspecting Hit Man locked in Hart's own finishing move, The Sharpshooter. The plan worked, but was ultimately received with great outrage by the WWE Universe and many in the locker room.

(2) Sullivan, K. (2010). *The WWE Championship: A Look Back at the Rich History of the WWE Championship*. New York: Simon & Schuster. Page 152. Hart, B. (2007). *Hitman: My Real Life in the Cartoon World of Wrestling*. New York: Random House Canada. Page 446.



Shawn Michaels performs a Sharpshooter on Bret Hart in the "Montreal Screwjob"



"There are a couple things that people don't understand about that night," says former WWE creative writer Vince Russo. "Number one, Vince threw twenty five scenarios past Bret—I was present for every single one of them—and Bret said 'no' every time. Number two, Vince's main concern was that Bret was going to show up on *Nitro* with the WWE Championship, which would have made Vince a laughing stock and embarrassed the entire company."

Vince McMahon and Bret Hart after the "Montreal Screwjob"



Affectionately referred to as the “Montreal Screwjob” by fans, the events of *Survivor Series* 1997 didn't just crown a new champion or mark the end of Bret Hart's active WWE career, it also played a major role in the creation of the Mr. McMahon character, one of the greatest antagonists in sports-entertainment history. For decades, Vince McMahon's real life role with the company was, as a general rule, never acknowledged on camera, leaving many fans to assume that he was merely an announcer hired by WWE to call the action in the ring. But when the Montreal Screwjob occurred, McMahon was forced to defend his decision on global television. And to do so in the most effective manner, he needed to pull the curtain back and reveal himself as the true owner of WWE.

“Prior to that, I wasn't looking at myself as an attraction at all. I was very happy behind the scenes, very happy with the business of the business.”

“It was pretty obvious after what I did to Bret that I was thought of as this extraordinary heel. Why not use that? I can't change the perception of what people think of me. If they're thinking that I'm the devil incarnate, great, let's go there. That's how the Mr. McMahon character was really born.”

— Vince McMahon



THE CURE FOR THE COMMON SHOW

Vince McMahon officially ushered in the Attitude Era on December 15, 1997, when he acknowledged to the *Raw* audience that WWE's programming was evolving into a much edgier product, one that required parental discretion for its younger viewers. The message was delivered in unprecedented fashion, as the owner of WWE had never addressed the audience directly during an on-camera vignette. It was a calculated risk by McMahon, who felt a need to be up front with certain portions of the audience that might find the new direction unsavory.

“At that period of time, we were in a massive war for everything. If it doesn't work, we're out of business. It was that drastic. At that time, we were getting killed and it really was a bold statement by Vince to come out and say, 'Listen, we're going to take creative in a whole new direction, so you might not want to let your kids watch at certain points.'”

— Triple H



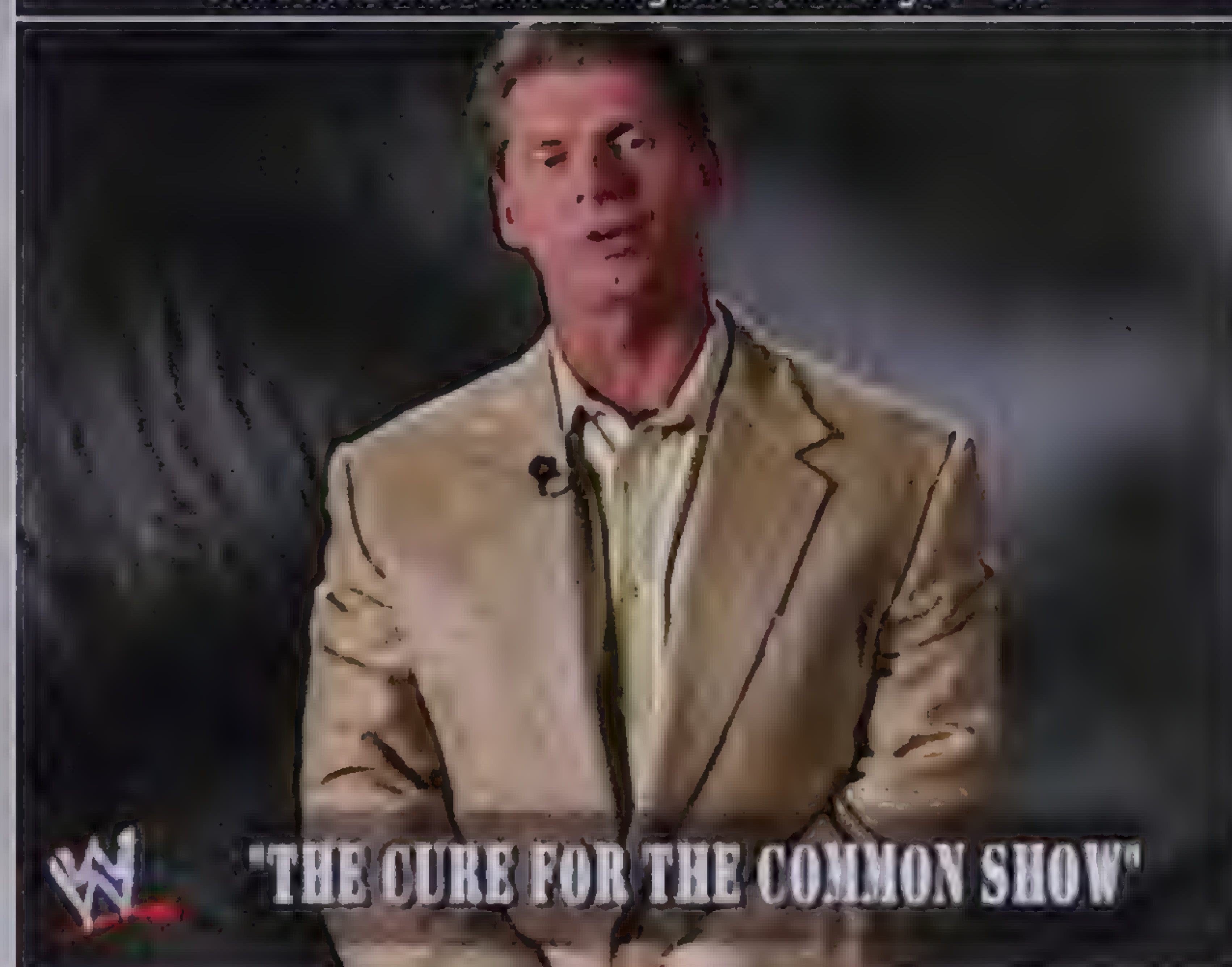
SUNDAY NIGHT HEAT

The Attitude Era's popularity helped lead to the creation of *Sunday Night Heat*, an hour-long WWE program broadcast on the USA Network. Prior to its August 1998 premiere, other names considered for *Heat* included:

- › WWE After Burner
- › WWE Heat Wave
- › WWE Meltdown
- › WWE Red Hot
- › WWE Global Warming

The bold move worked. A mere two weeks after McMahon alerted the WWE audience of the shift toward a more attitudinal product, *Raw* achieved its highest head-to-head rating since *Nitro* began regularly winning the Monday night ratings battle in June 1996.

Vince McMahon announcing a new and edgier “Era”



Viewers were turning to *Raw* in droves just to witness for themselves the never-before-seen, envelope-pushing WWE Superstars everybody was talking about. Among the most shocking were:

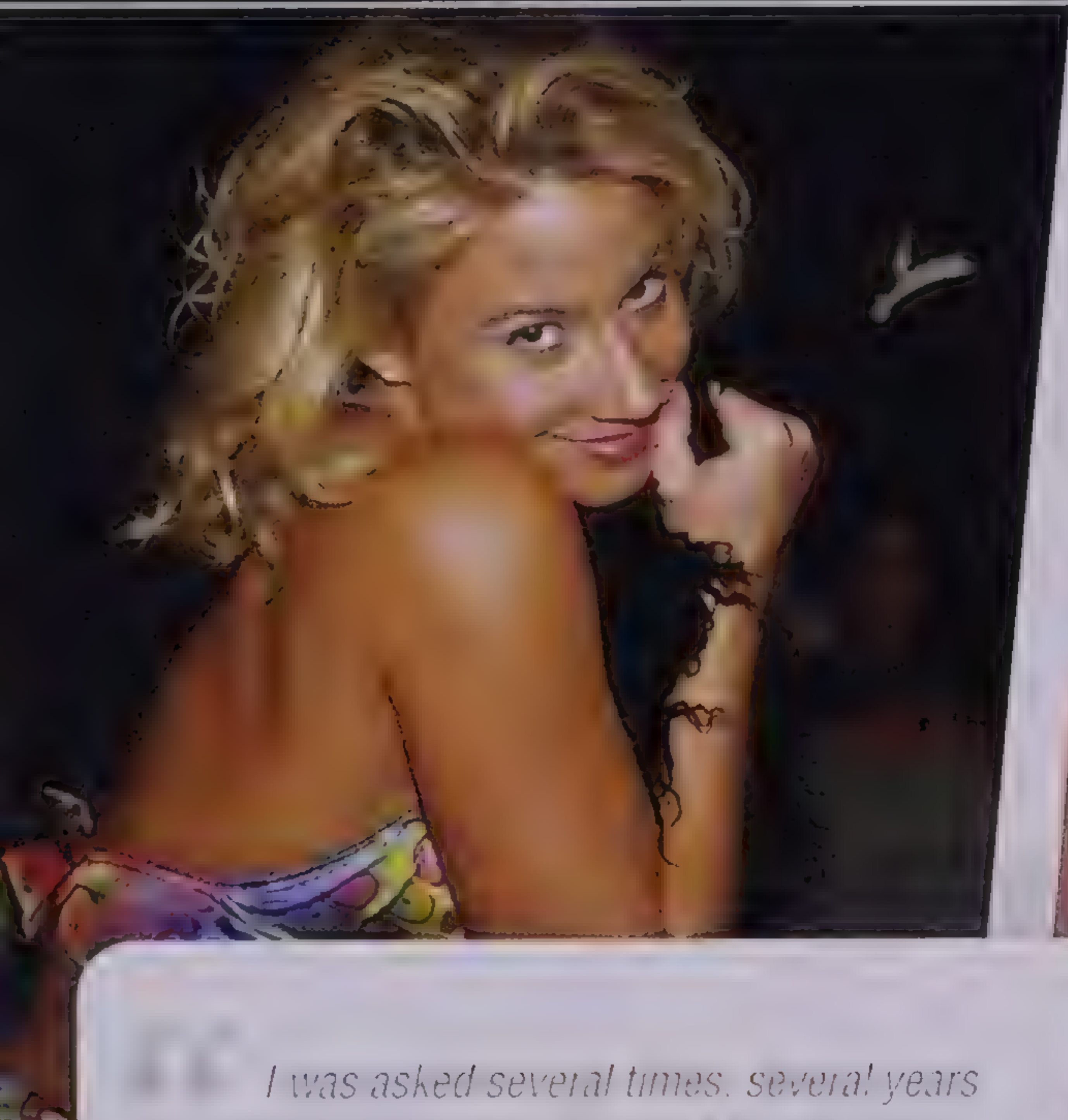
- › **Val Venis:** An adult film star turned WWE Superstar
- › **The Godfather:** A colorful Superstar, who surrounded himself with throngs of scantily-clad escorts, affectionately known as “The Ho Train”
- › **Darren Drozdov:** A former NFL player who could vomit on command
- › **Al Snow:** An offbeat Superstar, who suggested everybody wanted Head (by Head, he meant the mannequin head he carried to the ring)
- › **Gangrel:** A brooding Superstar, who drank a mysterious blood-colored liquid from a goth goblet
- › **Goldust:** The bizarre “Prince of Perversion”
- › **The APA:** A tag team who perpetually drank beer and smoked cigars in their backstage “office,” which consisted of a door frame and card table
- › **Kaientai:** A legion of Japanese Superstars best remembered for attempting to castrate Val Venis

DIVAS

"It was very PG when I first started," recalls Sunny. "Under my little Boddydonna skirts, I had full-back bloomers, just like a cheerleading skirt. And then we started switching. I was actually the first person to wear a thong on TV. They didn't even know I was going to wear a thong. It was like a one-piece bathing suit, but it was a thong back. I went out there in my robe, and I just took it off, and everybody was like 'gasp!' After that, everyone started loosening up a little bit more. And you saw more thongs, and a little more butt cheek."

A lot more butt cheek, actually. As the Attitude Era progressed, the Divas began to show more skin, particularly Miss Kitty, who celebrated winning the Women's Championship at *Armageddon* 1999 by flashing her bare breasts. The move even shocked officials backstage, who did not know she was going to do this. "I paused and slowly frame advanced that footage of Miss Kitty revealing herself over and over again," admits former WWE announcer Matt Striker. Other Divas, such as Jacqueline, fell victim to repeated wardrobe malfunctions. Eventually, the Diva movement of the late-90's led Sable, Chyna, and others to willingly bare all for the pages of *Playboy*.

Sunny



Sable

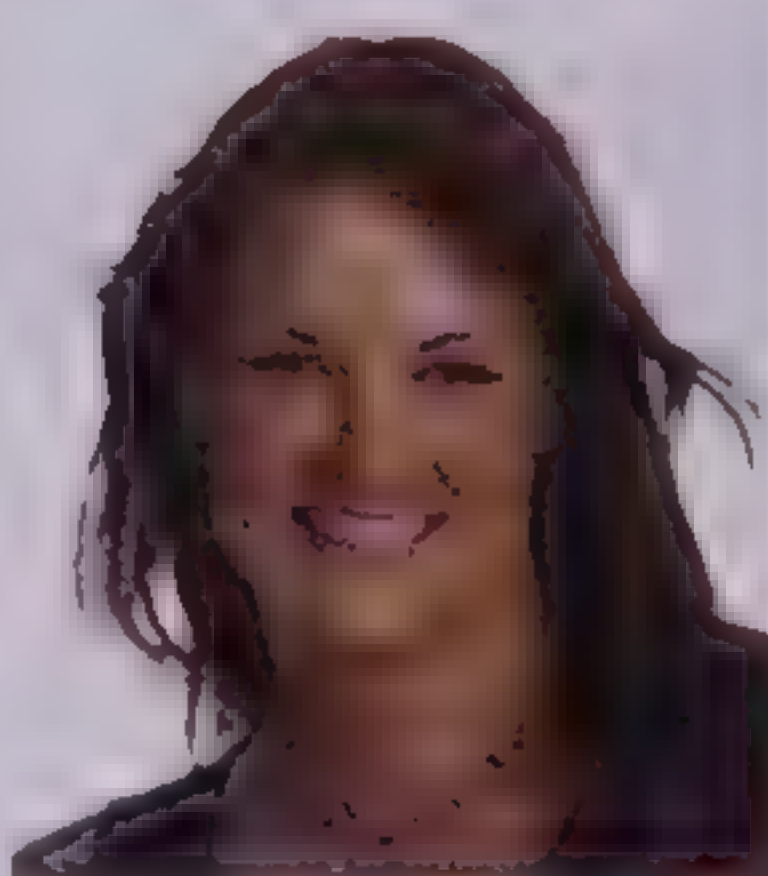


Miss Kitty



"I was asked several times, several years in a row, to do Playboy. It wasn't for me. But I still think it was a pretty neat thing for the Divas to do if they were cool with that."

— Lita



Chyna



"Anytime we can expand our reach outside of our audience in a place our audience is not normally found is a good thing for the WWE brand," says Stephanie McMahon. "It brings new eyeballs onto our programming; it gets people interested. Sable and Chyna doing *Playboy* was one of those times because suddenly we were mainstream. We were competing in a space that we had never been in before."



Despite their obvious sex appeal, the Divas of the Attitude Era proved to be so much more than eye candy. They also became integral parts of television storylines and appreciated in-ring performers. Their athleticism was so valued, in fact, that WWE reinstated the respected Women's Championship, which gave the Divas an opportunity to showcase their undeniable in-ring presence alongside WWE's male Superstars.

It wasn't long before Women's Championship Matches became among the most popular on the card. As a result, WWE officials had no choice but to continually put them in high-profile spots, including pay-per-views. Starting in November 1998, the Women's Title was defended at *Survivor Series*, *Royal Rumble*, *WrestleMania*, and *SummerSlam*. This marked the first time in history the Women's Championship was featured consecutively on WWE's "big four" pay-per-views. At one point Chyna even won the Intercontinental Championship from Jeff Jarrett, becoming the only woman in history to hold a men's championship.



Fabulous Moolah: First title-holder of the Women's Championship



STONE COLD

With his complete disregard for authority and brash temperament, Stone Cold Steve Austin eventually emerged as the undeniable face of the Attitude Era. But becoming synonymous with one of the greatest periods in sports-entertainment history didn't happen overnight.

Austin joined WWE in January 1996, following his WCW firing and a short stint in ECW. Upon his arrival, he adopted a "Ringmaster" moniker and took on Ted DiBiase as his manager and mouthpiece. Those who knew of Austin's superior in-ring skills and stellar work on the microphone in ECW certainly scratched their heads at Austin's new character.

"When Steve came here, he was given the name the 'Ringmaster' because he had those skills, much like a Bret Hart," recalls McMahon. "But after a while, Steve came to me and said, 'Vince, I'm just not the Ringmaster.' I said, 'okay, who are you?'"

Austin went home and thought about McMahon's query. While brainstorming, his wife made him a cup of tea and urged him to drink it before it became "stone cold." At that very moment, a light bulb went off in Austin's head and one of the most well-known names in sports-entertainment history was born.

Let's be realistic about it: the Attitude Era should've been called the Stone Cold Era. I was the driving force during that period. I always took a little bit of offense to the term 'Attitude Era' because, in my mind, wrestlers should always have attitude. If you don't you're not going to be very successful. Of course, I was a different cup of tea with the select words I used and middle fingers.



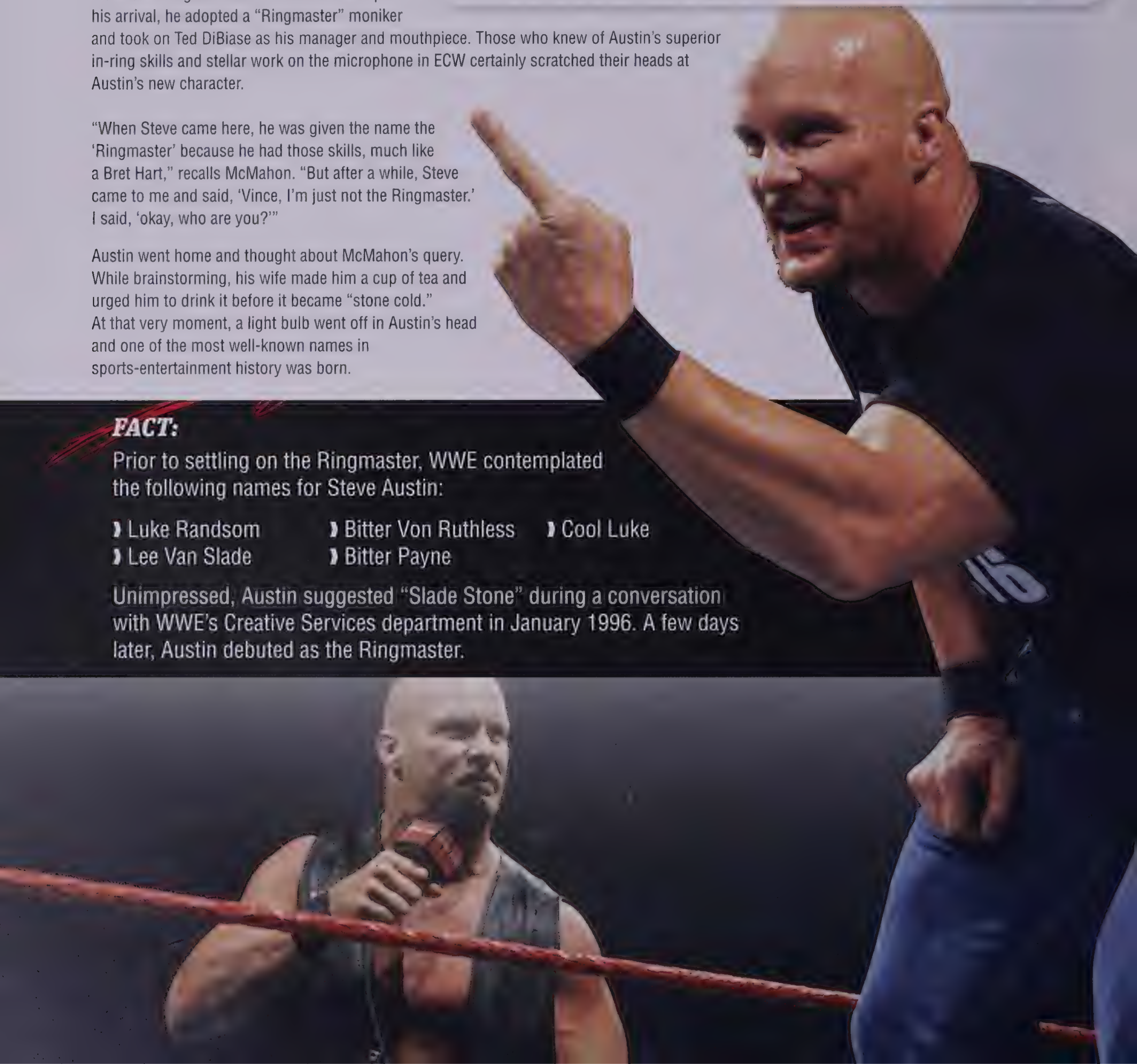
— Stone Cold Steve Austin

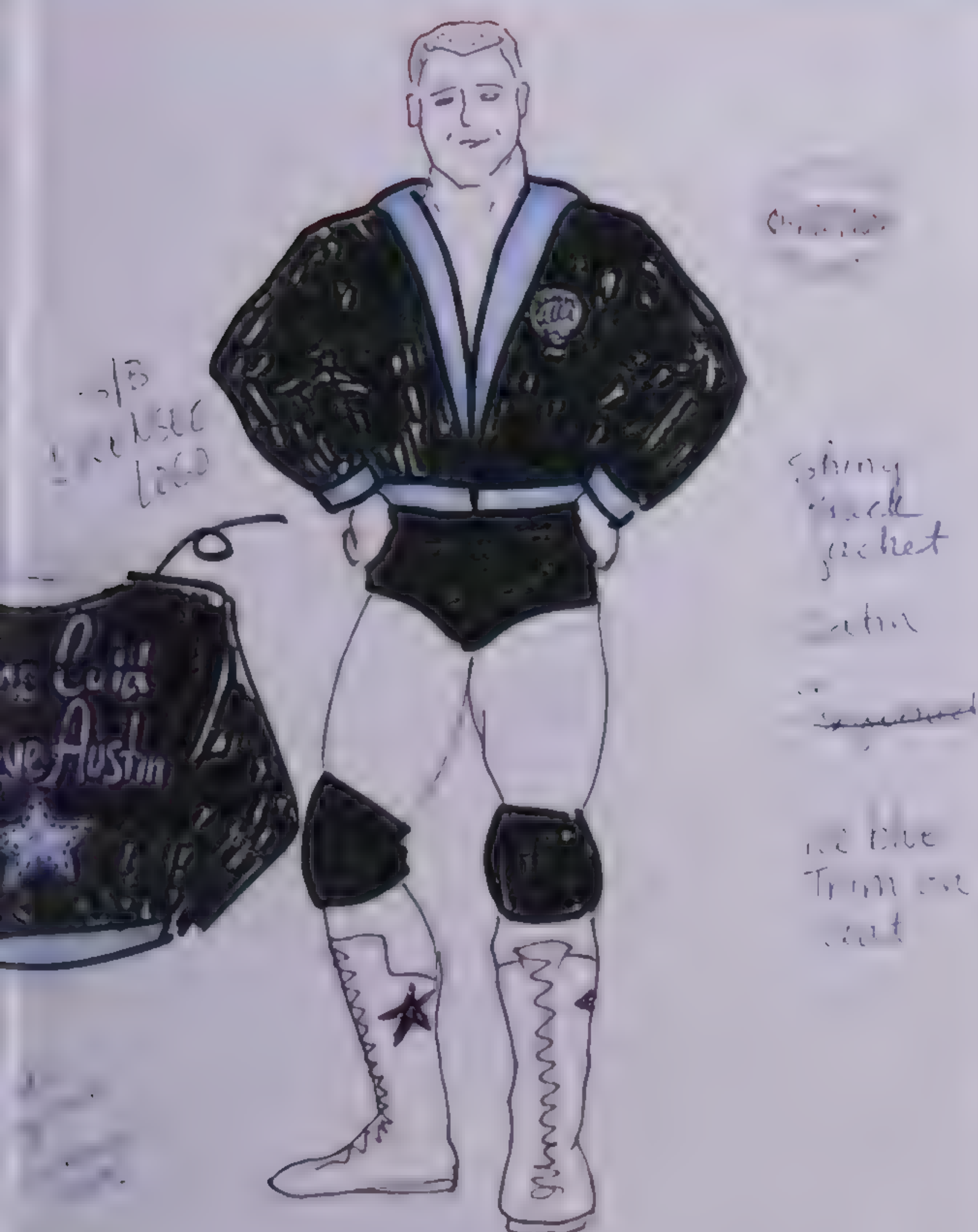
FACT:

Prior to settling on the Ringmaster, WWE contemplated the following names for Steve Austin:

- ▶ Luke Ransom
- ▶ Bitter Von Ruthless
- ▶ Cool Luke
- ▶ Lee Van Slade
- ▶ Bitter Payne

Unimpressed, Austin suggested "Slade Stone" during a conversation with WWE's Creative Services department in January 1996. A few days later, Austin debuted as the Ringmaster.





Early concept art illustrates WWE's vision for Stone Cold Steve Austin

As Stone Cold, Austin started showing signs of attitude as early as June 1996, when he defeated Jake Roberts to win the coveted King of the Ring tournament. After the match, Stone Cold called Roberts a "piece of crap," mocked him for being a bible "thumper," and proclaimed, "Austin 3:16 says I just whipped your ass!" This particular phrase is revered as a pivotal moment for WWE. The overwhelming fan response helped open the floodgates for the Attitude Era, and to this day "Austin 3:16" is one of the highest selling t-shirts in WWE history.

The edgy Austin resonated with fans far better than the "Ringmaster," and it was becoming obvious that superstardom was right around the corner. But before he could get there, Stone Cold suffered a serious neck injury while on the receiving end of an Owen Hart piledriver at *SummerSlam* 1997.

"I was getting hotter and hotter, and it was a real interesting time because I was becoming so bulletproof, so powerful, and so strong, and the momentum was happening so fast," recalls Austin. "It was just like being in a drag car and going 300 miles per hour down a quarter-mile track, and the quarter-mile track never ended. And god dang it, just

when you thought it couldn't get any hotter, we rolled into *SummerSlam*."

Fifteen minutes into their match, Hart hit Austin with a piledriver that would render him motionless for several moments.

"I was totally disoriented," says Austin. "There's so many emotions when you come that close to almost being paralyzed for the rest of your life, it really F's your head up."



“My brother, Owen, always told me that it was Steve's idea to do the piledriver to him, and that he didn't necessarily want to do it.”

—Bret Hart



Stone Cold vs. Owen Hart at SummerSlam 1997



Spinal cord trauma at the C3-4 disc level sidelined Austin for an extended period. But when he finally returned, Stone Cold proved to be hotter than ever, thanks in large part to a budding rivalry with his boss, Mr. McMahon. As WWE's ultimate authority, McMahon objected to Stone Cold waving his middle fingers and constant beer chugging. But that didn't stop Austin. The more McMahon objected, the more unruly the popular Superstar became.

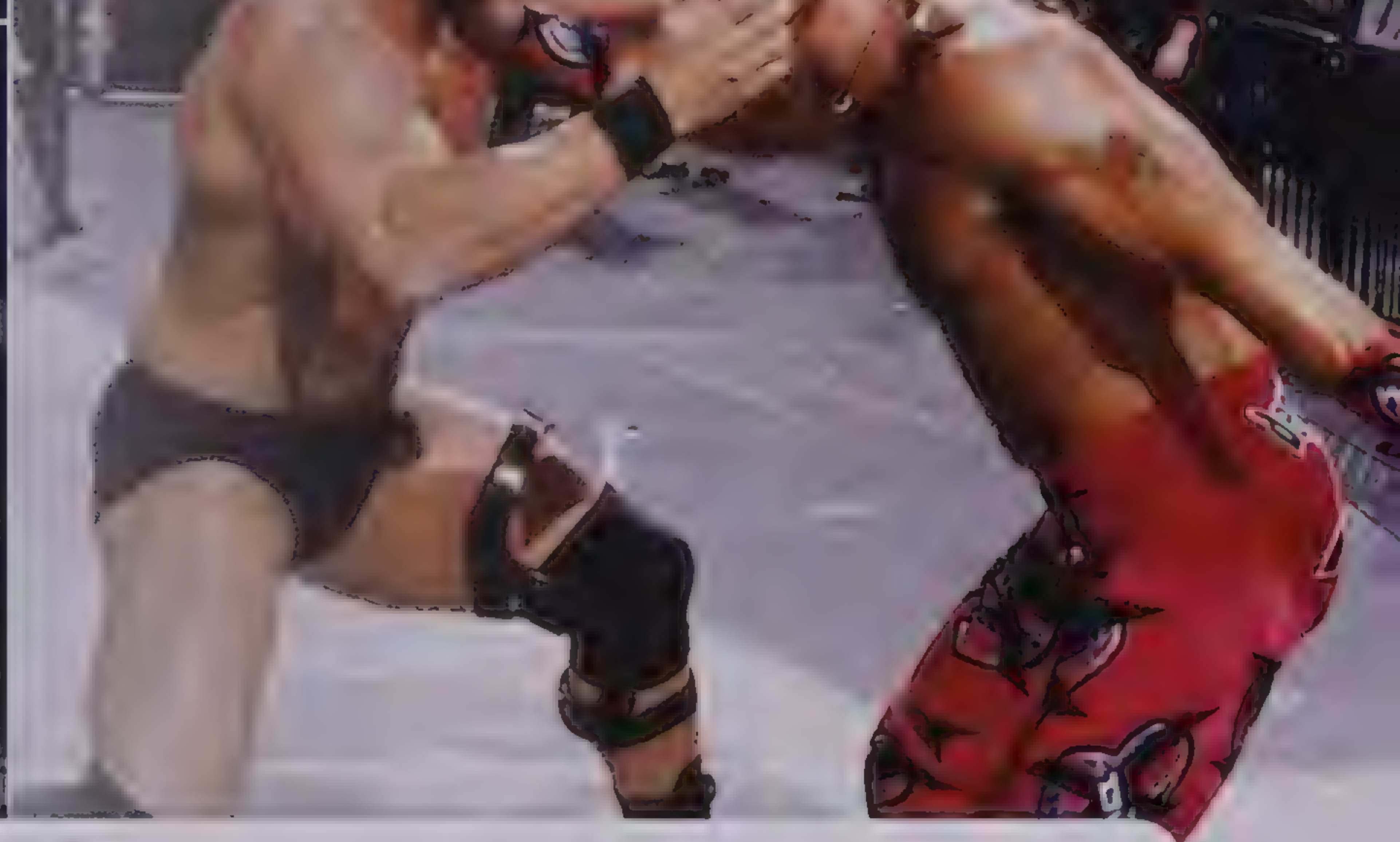
Stone Cold's rebellious attitude began to attract new viewers, many of which were looking to live vicariously through Austin's everyman persona. Behind the scenes, Austin's legitimate injury forced WWE to come up with scenarios to advance his storyline without an actual wrestling match. This proved to be a blessing in disguise, as fans fell in love with Austin's antics. For them, it was easy to relate to Stone Cold; they've all experienced the effects of a domineering boss. The only difference was Stone Cold went to extreme, over-the-top measures to humiliate his superior. With each passing Stunner Mr. McMahon received, millions of fans watching wished they could do the same to their bosses.

By year's end, *Raw* had scored a 3.6 rating, their highest head-to-head number in more than a year and a half. And as the calendar turned to 1998, the rating trends proved that it was Austin's time to be WWE's top star. But getting the title from then-WWE Champion Shawn Michaels to Stone Cold at *WrestleMania XIV* was no easy task, considering HBK's physical and mental state at the time.

"It was really difficult to work with Michaels," recalls Austin. "When he's ready to go, he can go like nobody else. But when he didn't want to go, there were a million reasons why. He did have some back problems, and he had a lot of attitude and personal problems, too. There was a lot of stuff going on at that point."

They got through the match and by night's end, Stone Cold had been crowned the new WWE Champion and Michaels was on his way back home, but not before being floored by the match's special enforcer, Mike Tyson.

Stone Cold vs. Shawn Michaels at WrestleMania XIV



Tyson turns on D-Generation X

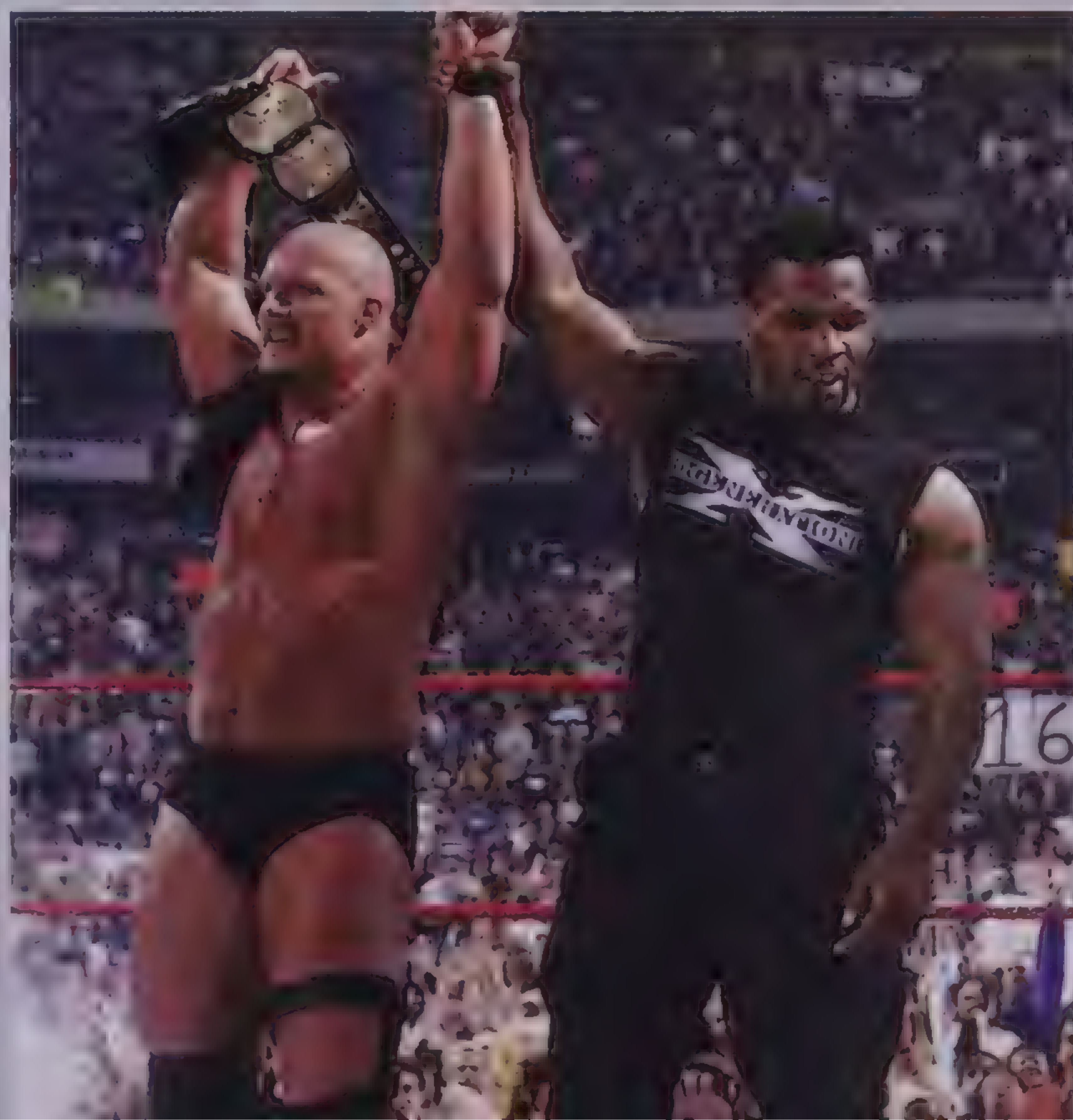


With the WWE Championship wrapped securely around Stone Cold's waist, the Attitude Era reached an even bolder level, despite Mr. McMahon's continued attempts to keep a leash around its biggest offender. But Austin couldn't be reigned in. Instead, he became even more defiant, soaking McMahon with beer, filling his Corvette with cement, and crashing his ring with a Zamboni.

"Stone Cold's character, contrary to Mr. McMahon's at the time, probably brought a larger television audience because it wasn't just traditional wrestling," says McMahon. "It was different; it was action-adventure, with a little comedy thrown in for relief. I think it helped because more people were watching for different reasons. And the Stone Cold character became one where you never knew what he was going to do."

My biggest contribution to Tyson was the DX swerve. To me, it was so obvious that he was going to go head to head with Shawn. It was so obvious that I was like 'You've got to make him go the other way.'

—Vince Russo



THE ATTITUDE ERA:

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

STONE COLD STUNS McMAHON



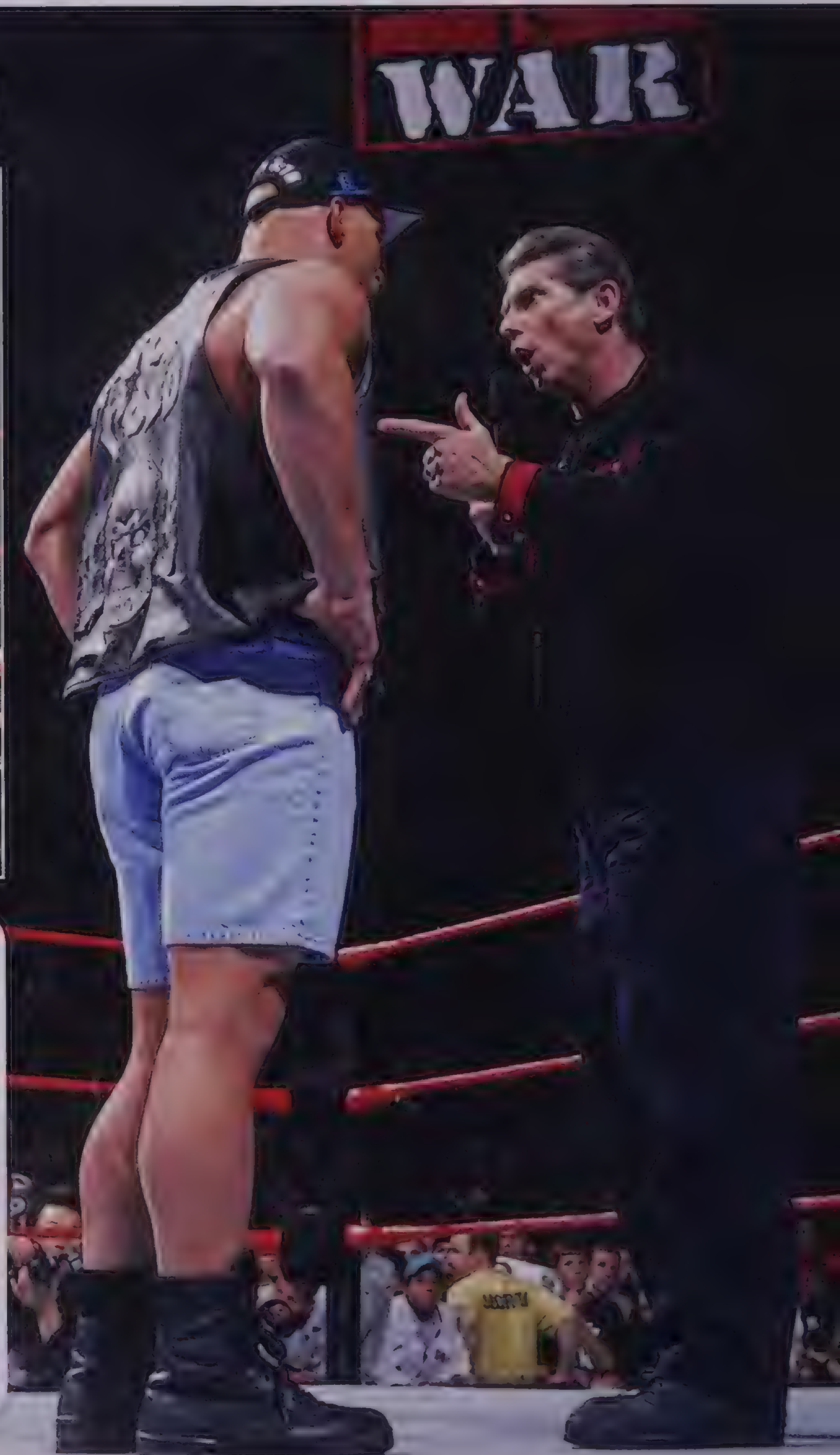
SEPTEMBER 22, 1997



"I always wanted to be a performer, always wanted to be a talent. But my dad said there was no way that was ever going to happen. I respected his wishes and pushed as far as I could, but he would say, 'Don't ever ask me again.'"

"So when I had the chance later in life to enter the business as a performer, that was a great moment for me, especially because I got to do it in the mecca, MSG. To be able to do that one bit of performance there and take that bump, as we say, and to be able to hear the roar of the crowd, that was some good stuff. It meant a great deal to me personally."

— Vince McMahon



INTERCONTINENTAL TITLE GOES FOR A DIP



DECEMBER 15, 1997

The Rock's reaction to Steve Austin throwing the Championship off of the bridge



“Doing all the shenanigans with The Rock, throwing the championships off the bridge, or paging him with the 3:16, and the way he'd sell it with his eyes...there was a natural chemistry there. Rock and I always got along, as soon as we met each other. We never ran in the same circles. We never travelled together. We never did hang out together, but there was just a bond, a respect and a trust there. There was something about The Rock.”

— Stone Cold Steve Austin





Triple H took the reigns of DX after HBK left WWE in 1998



A NEW DX IS BORN

RAW

MARCH 30, 1998

My biggest fear was going out there and not getting a reaction. I was used to walking out there with the nWo and the roof blowing off the place. I remember Vince telling me, 'Go out there and give it to them. Say whatever you want; I don't care. People are expecting you to say something big; go out there and do it.' All of a sudden I felt this huge pressure and I was nervous. People remember the promo I cut on Eric Bischoff and Hogan fondly, but it was pretty rough, if you really dissect it, because I was so nervous.



— Sean Waltman (X-Pac)



DX INVADES WCW



APRIL 27, 1998



“There was this 30-foot door. I’m trying to get this old man to open it up. Me and Scott [Hall] are there and we’re thinking, ‘This is going to be amazing.’ We were going to go off Nitro and onto Raw. Nobody’s going to get in trouble, we were just going to walk out there and be their buddies for a second. But the old man wouldn’t lift the thing up.”

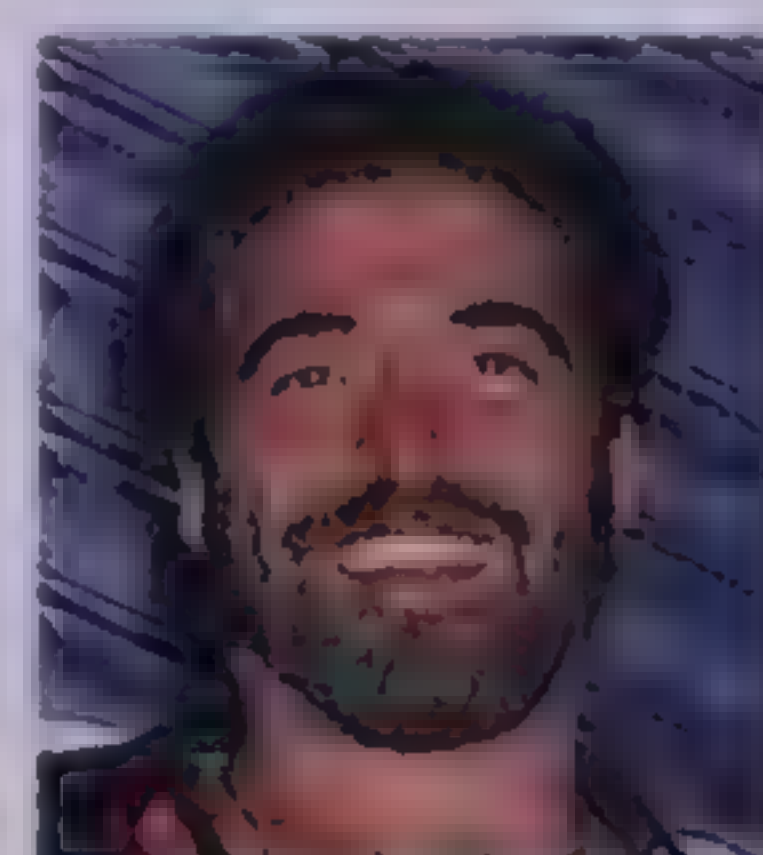
— Kevin Nash



“I’ll never forget it. I’m sitting at my desk and I’m thinking to myself, ‘You know what. I’m just going to write down, for the hell of it, ‘DX drives a rocket launcher right up to the building.’”

“We had a guy at WWE; his name was Richie. He was the prop guy. Whatever you asked Richie to get, he would get. No matter what it was, it always looked great and it always worked. Sure enough, I put down in the format, ‘DX drives a rocket launcher,’ never thinking in my wildest dreams that this lunatic is going to find a rocket launcher. Less than 24 hours later, I get a call from Richie. ‘Vince, we got you a rocket launcher.’”

— Vince Russo



SABLE'S HANDPRINT "BIKINI"

FULLY LOADED

JULY 26, 1998

“ I remember when she came out with the latex handprints over her; I was like, 'What? You can't do that. How can you do that?' **”**

— Lila



“ Sable coming out with handprints on her breasts might not have been good for little Johnny to watch. I often say, there are 12 or 13-year-old kids who take that show and watch it over and over and over again. **”**

— Jim Ross



BRAWL FOR ALL, SUMMER 1998



“ We incurred ridiculous medical expenses thanks to the Brawl For All. We lost guys due to injury. We may have even inadvertently shortened careers of some guys. At the end of the day, Bart Gunn was dominant in it, and his reward was getting knocked out by Butterbean. Looking back at it, hindsight 20/20, did we do a great job making a star from the Brawl For All? Not a single soul was made. **”**

— Jim Ross

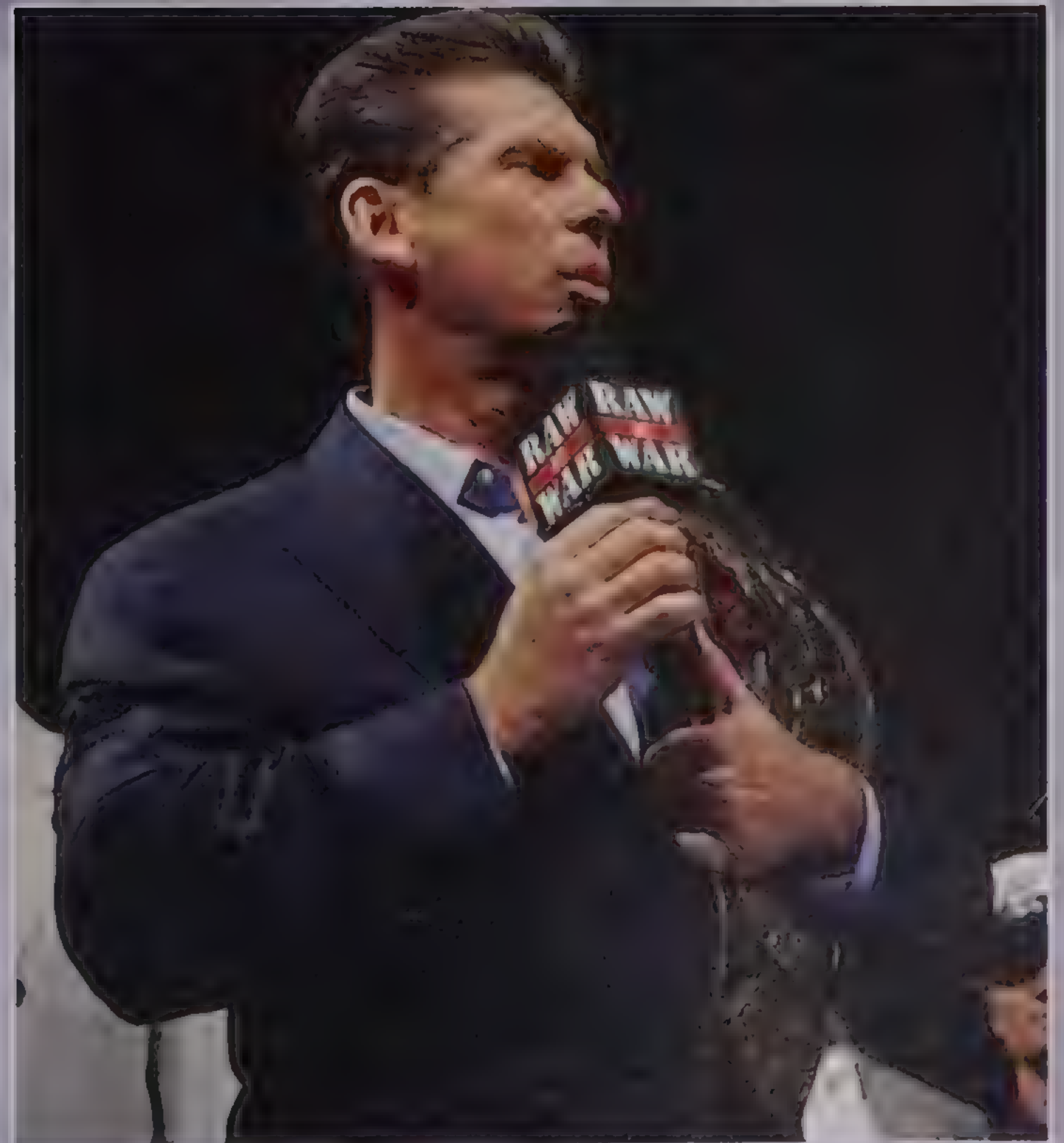


STONE COLD ZAMBONI

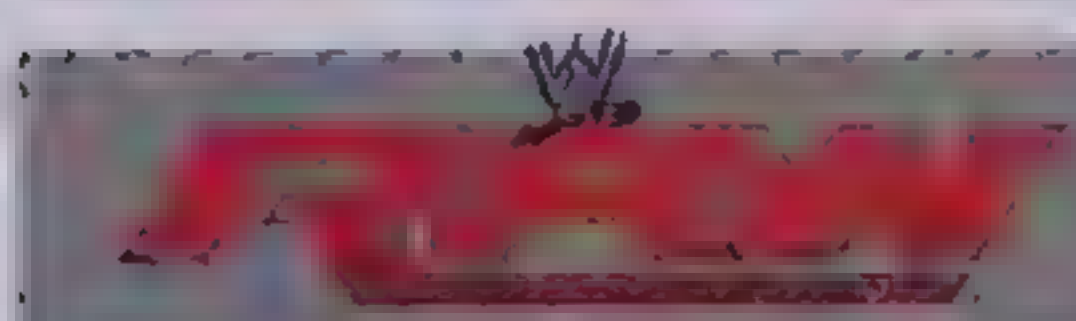
SEPTEMBER 28, 1998

Driving the Zamboni into the ring, diving off and catching Vince with a clothesline, beating the tar out of him, getting arrested... This is some of the stuff that you didn't need to be a wrestling fan to enjoy. You could be anybody and watch this crazy stuff that was going on in our show, which was just top-notch entertainment

— Stone Cold Steve Austin



CEMENT-FILLED CORVETTE



OCTOBER 12, 1998

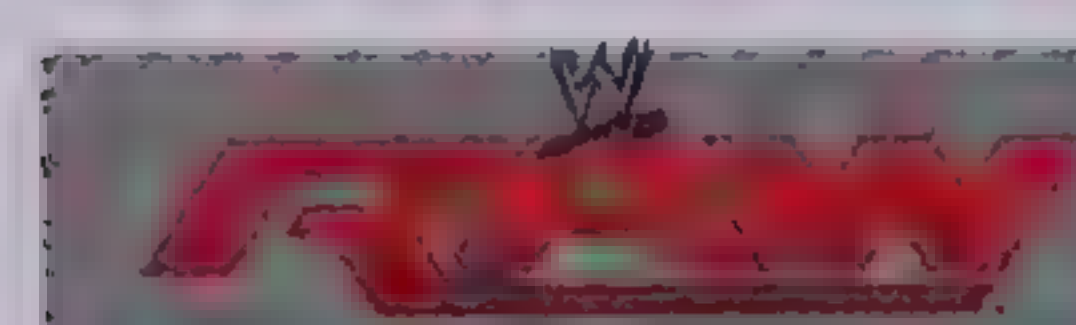


The way those trays folded down to pour that cement into the convertible Corvette, which was Vince's car, you had to do that with precision. I had to hit a certain mark, and I had to fold those trays down to the right spot. It would have been real easy to screw up that gig, but man, I'm a sink-or-swim guy: and on that night, I swam, poured the cement right where it needed to go, and got the bonus when the windows shattered and the cement came pouring out the other side. That was a blast.

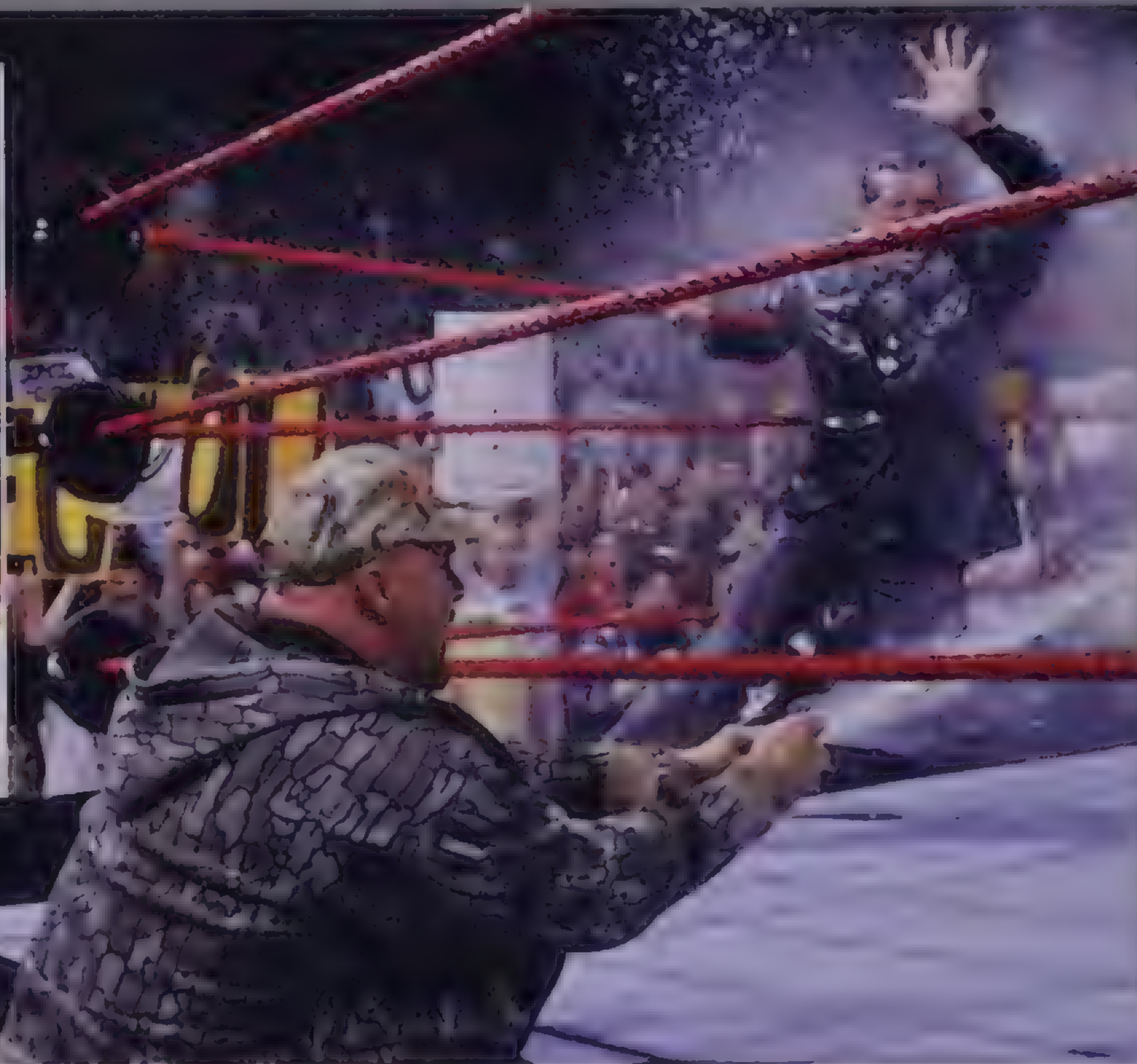
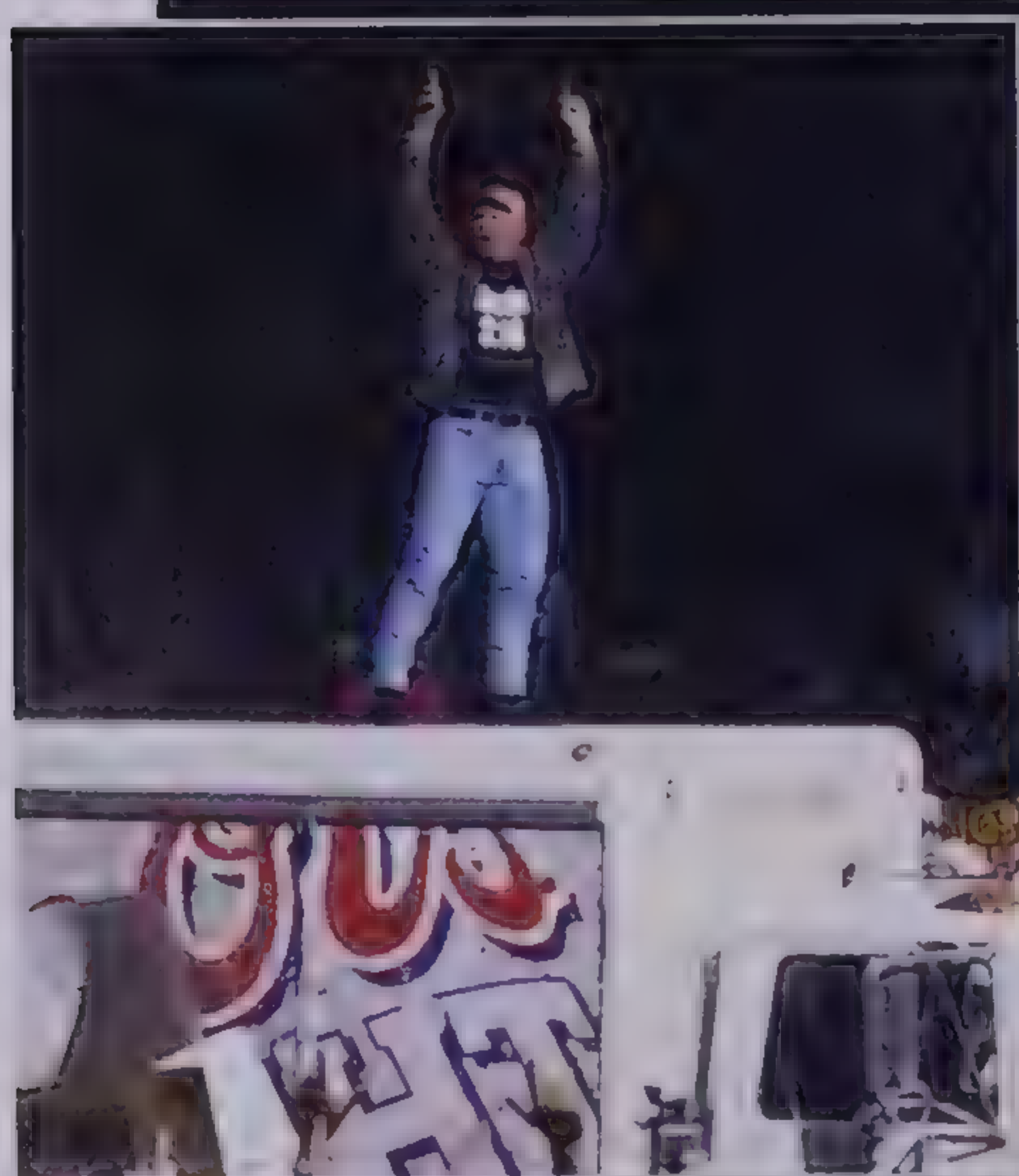
— Stone Cold Steve Austin



STONE COLD BEER BATH



MARCH 22, 1999



When they first hit me with that idea. I said, 'Damn, that's badass.' But what they didn't see on camera was me trying to give myself a drink. The only problem was that I forgot to take my thumb off the nozzle, causing all this beer to come shooting at me. If I had tonsils, it would've washed them right down my throat. But we were live, and when that red light's on, I'm always going to regain my composure very quickly. So I acted like nothing happened, but damn, it turned my eyelids inside out.

— Stone Cold Steve Austin



UNHOLY MATRIMONY

RAW

APRIL 26, 1999



I loved every part of that storyline, from the burning teddy bear to the ransacking of my supposed bedroom to being found in the gutter under the building, although maybe that part wasn't so great. When I was actually strapped down to the Undertaker's symbol, being carried to the ring, I was almost decapitated by the APA, little known fact. They were shoving the symbol under the bottom rope, and thank God for John Bradshaw Layfield, because he actually stopped it.

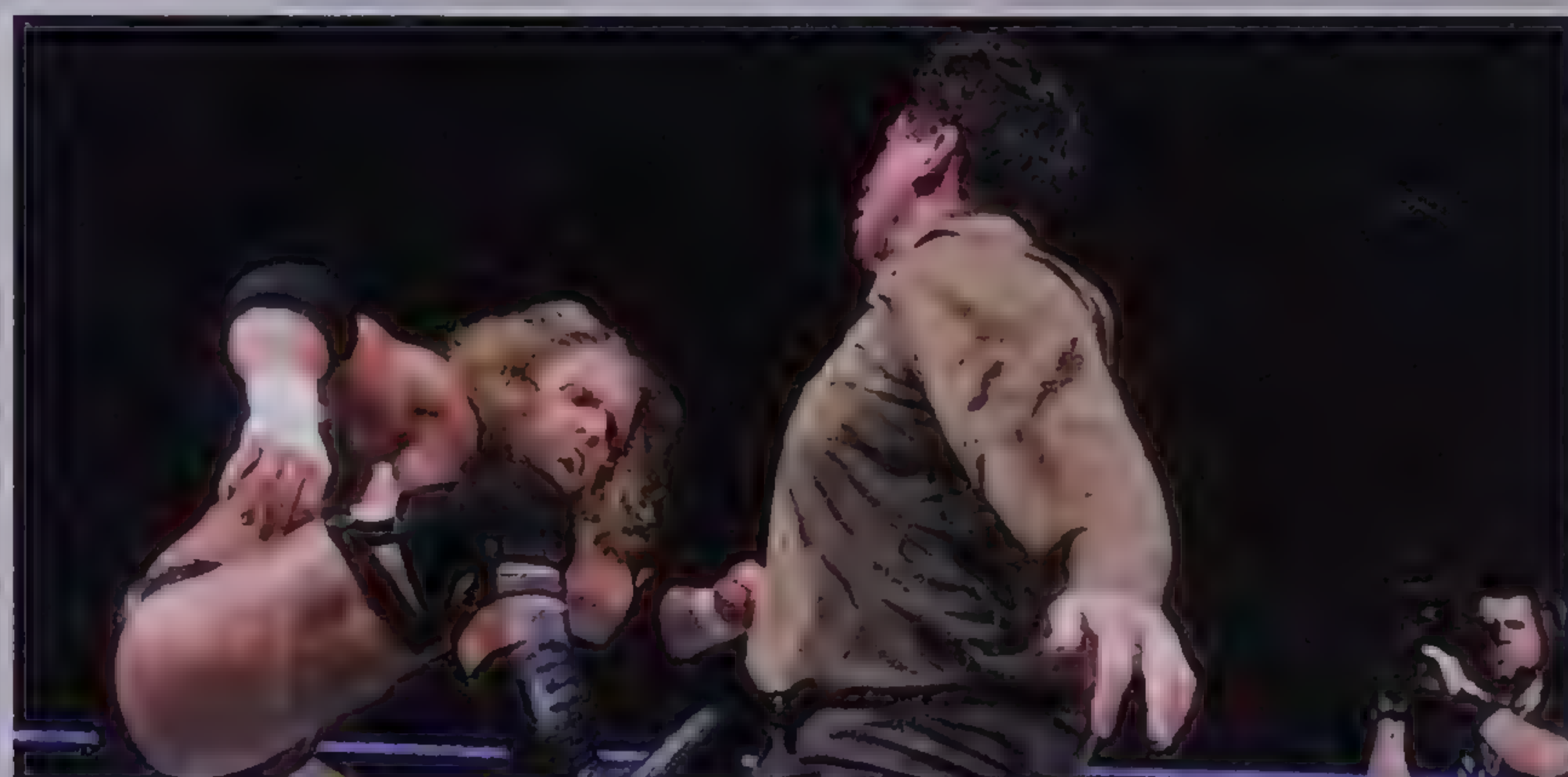
— Stephanie McMahon



Mr. McMAHON BECOMES WWE CHAMPION

SMACK
DOWN

SEPTEMBER 16, 1999



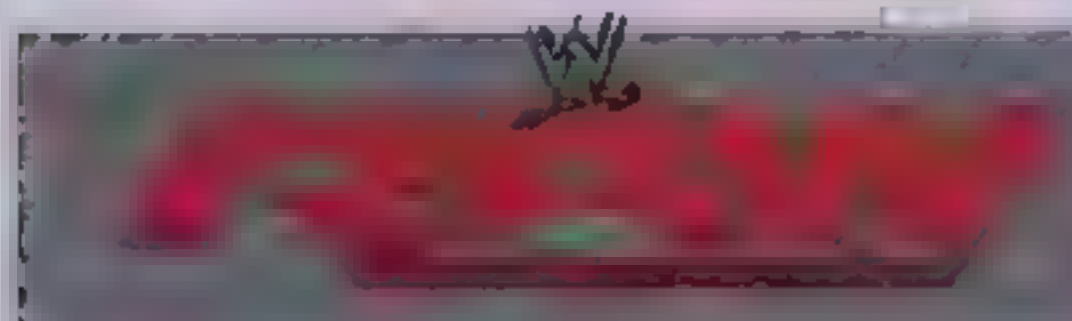
I beat the holy hell out of Triple H, and it was easy for me to do. I always thought he was a tough guy. And as I recall this match, it didn't take me long to beat him. He was like a plusher: he was like a cream puff, and that was fun for me because it was basically very little competition.

"Then on the other hand, was it the same experience as it would be for a WWE Superstar? No, because first of all, that was a short-lived situation. It was a transition to something else and clearly neither my character, nor me as a human being, had earned that right. So it did not mean the same to me because I knew I wasn't supposed to be there and had not earned that privilege. Generally speaking, when someone has become a champion they have worked hard, they have paid their dues and things of that nature to become a true champion, both in the ring and outside the ring. I had not earned that right, nor was I a champion for very long."

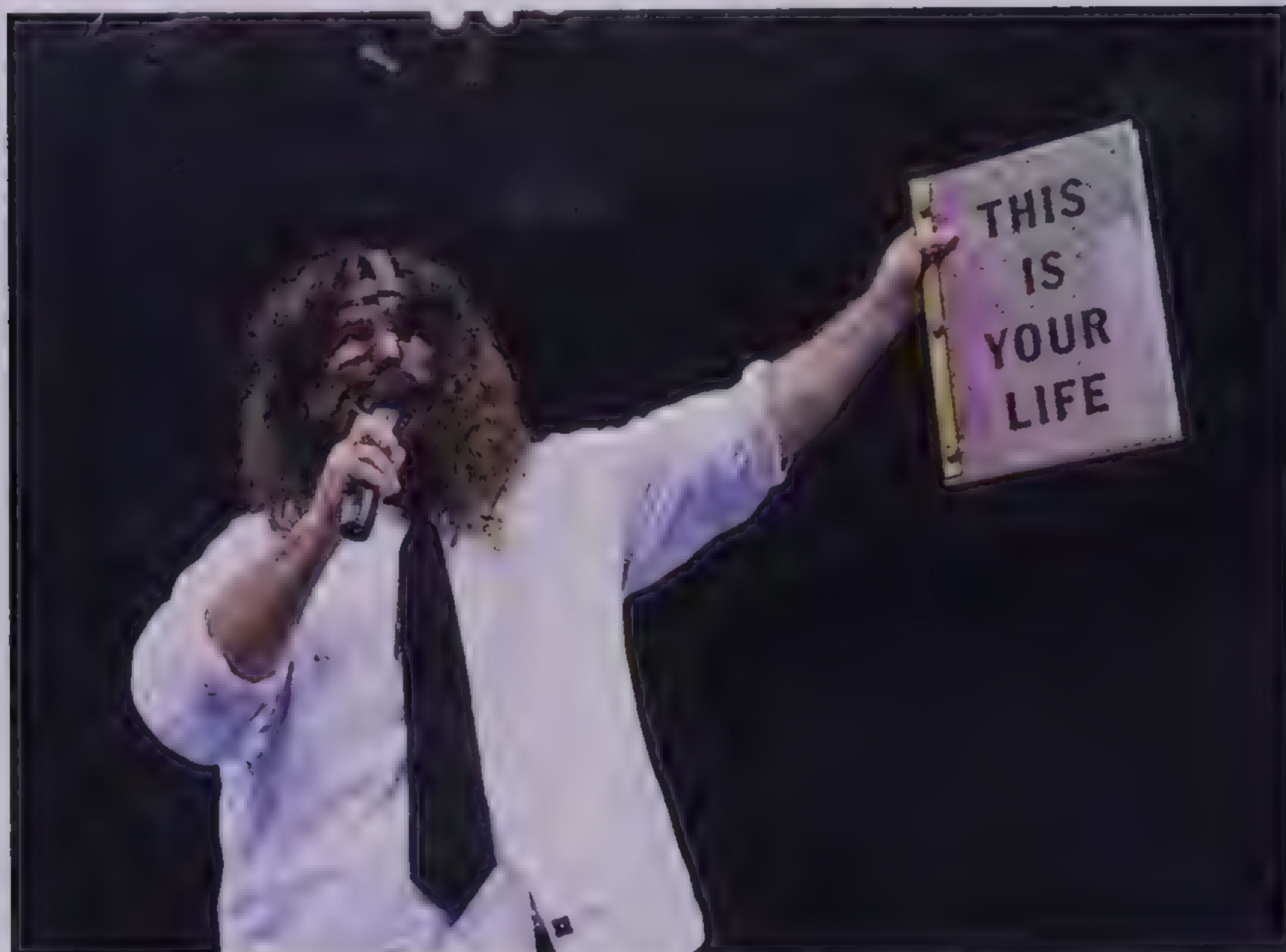
— Vince McMahon



THIS IS YOUR LIFE, ROCK



SEPTEMBER 27, 1999



“What people don’t know is that behind the scenes, Mr. McMahon hated this segment. It was scheduled for 14 minutes; it went 26 on live national television. It was a train wreck. We were kind of reprimanded when we came back. Vince Russo told me later that Vince McMahon was beside himself behind the curtain. He hated it.”

— Mick Foley



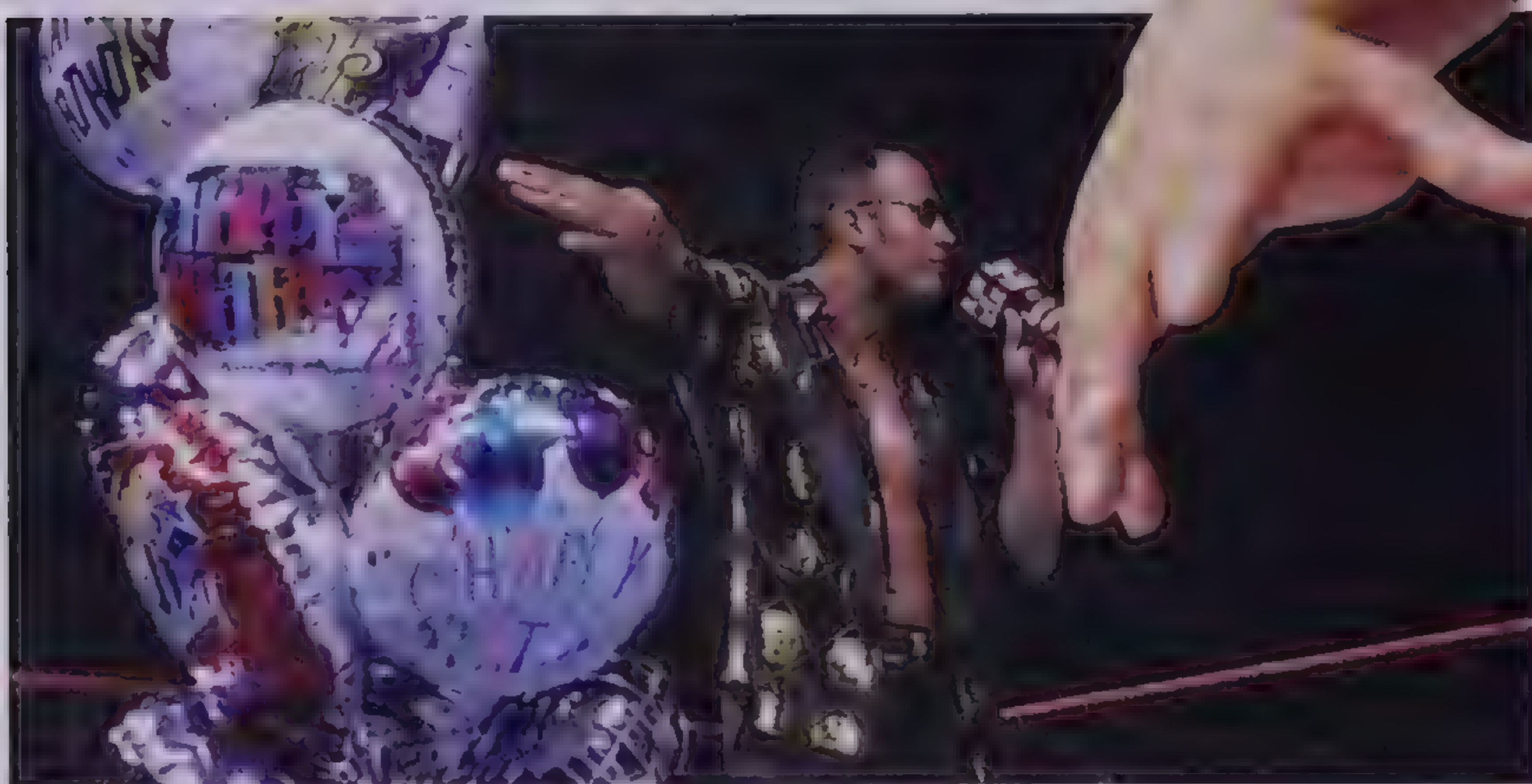
PAYING DISRESPECTS



NOVEMBER 11, 1999

“When we started talking about this angle, I saw it as a chance for people to see a different side of me. We actually had to lighten the angle up because back then, some people didn’t understand we were entertainment. I remember I dove on the casket in the graveyard scene. We did that for a laugh because Boss Man was getting death threats. It was a serious, heated angle.”

— Big Show



TRIPLE H AND STEPHANIE TIE THE KNOT

NOVEMBER 29, 1999

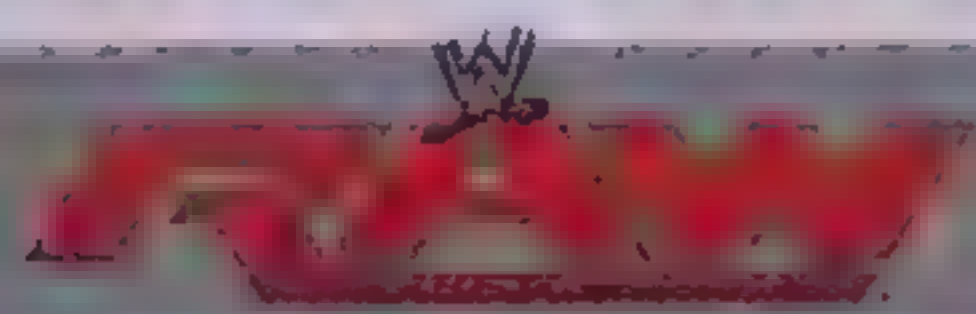


“It’s one of those life-imitating-art things. It confuses fans to this day. They see Steph and I together, and they are like, ‘Oh, you guys are really married? I thought that was just for TV.’ It’s weird. Steph and I really didn’t know each other until we did that angle. I knew who she was and I knew to say hello. But I had never been around her or spent any time with her. One of the first times I ever spent more than 10 minutes with her was when we did the wedding. When I went through the drive-through chapel, it was probably the most I had ever spoken to her in my life.”

— Triple H



MAE YOUNG GIVES BIRTH TO HAND



FEBRUARY 28, 2000

I had no clue why [Mae gave birth to a hand]. I even asked Vince. 'Why a hand?' And he said, 'It's a hand' and laughed hysterically. I was still confused. He didn't even answer the question.

— Mark Henry



Mae Young's "hand"-some son, all grown up



D-XPLOSION



APRIL 27, 2000



66 Austin dropped a big crane on the bus and blew it up. In reality, the crane was moving about a half a mile an hour when it first hit the DX bus. Steve was actually running the crane and it just dinked it; it barely touched it. It just sat there and we were in the ring supposed to be reacting to this big thing, but nothing is happening and people are laughing.

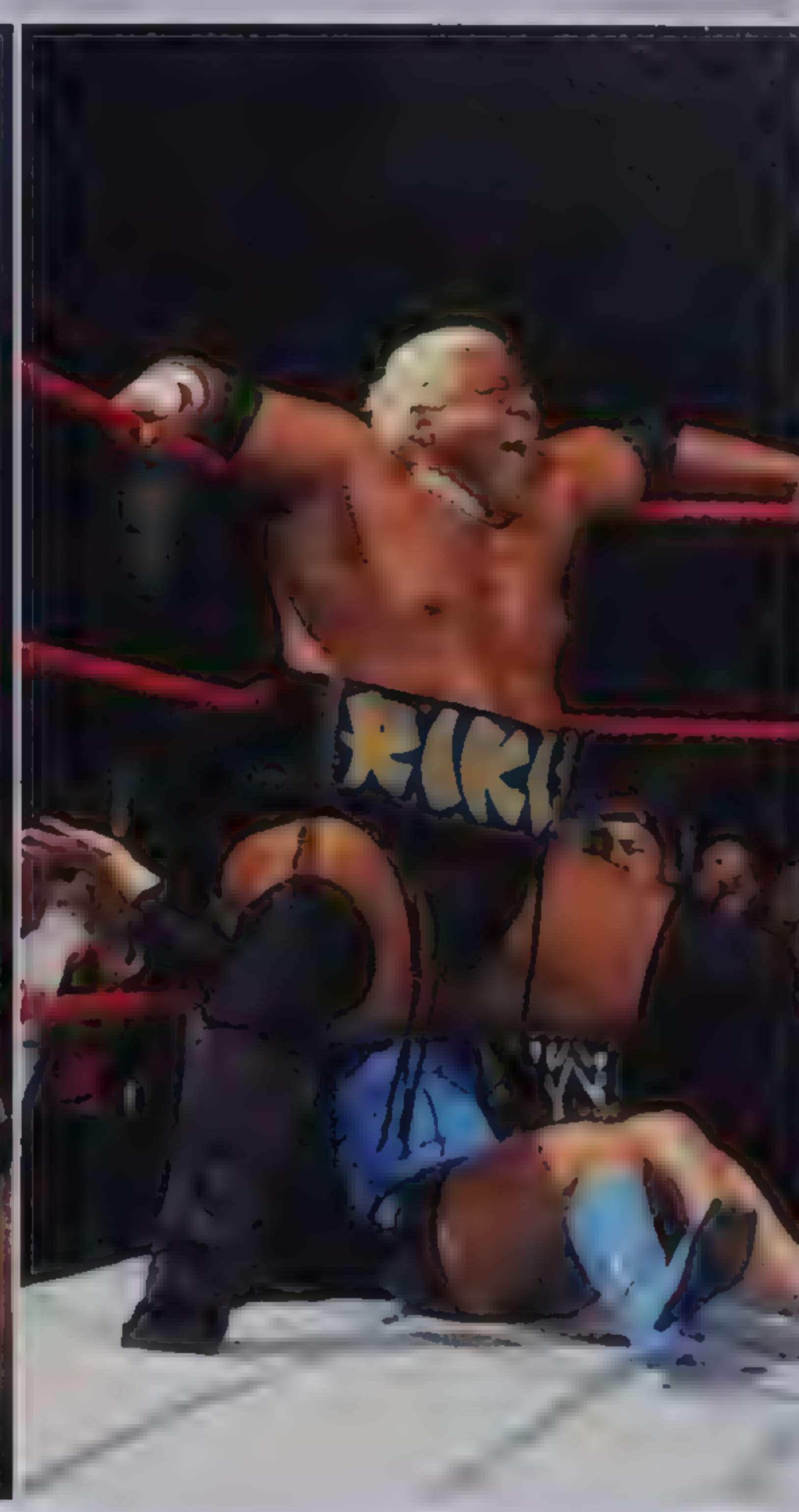
— Triple H



RIKISHI'S STINKFACE TO TRISH

RAW

JUNE 5, 2000



66 When I sat on Trish Stratus, all you could see were these big butt cheeks with blonde hair coming out the side. It was like her head disappeared in my ass. But it was all good; there were no hard feelings.

— Rikishi



RIKISHI'S FALL FROM HELL

ARMAGEDDON

DECEMBER 12, 2000

66 When I landed, I looked up to [Undertaker] and he looked at me, and you could actually see he was still shaking. I was still nervous; I didn't know if I had made it or not. That bump there, it was one of the most memorable bumps that will ever be in my career. It was the scariest bump that I probably ever took in professional wrestling.

— Rikishi



GOING PUBLIC



Vince and Linda McMahon

After more than 30 years of operating as a family-owned business, WWE made the bold move of becoming a publicly-traded company on October 19, 1999. For WWE, a company that reported a net loss of \$4.4 million in 1995, the initial public offering placed the value of the corporation at more than \$1 billion.

Selling its stock on the Nasdaq Stock Market, WWE's IPO of 10 million shares were priced at \$17 per share. By the end of the first day of trading, the price climbed 48 percent to close at \$25.25 per share. The IPO's success gave the company a high level of working capital and stability that was absent in years prior to going public. And for the stock-purchasing public, the offering was an opportunity for fans of WWE to be a part of something special.

"I really love the idea that this company personifies Americana," says Vince McMahon. "Why wouldn't the average American want a piece of Americana? There are a lot of institutions that buy us, but I wanted the American public to have a piece of this."

You are investing in Americana when you invest in us.



—Vince McMahon



With thousands of Americans now investing their hard-earned money in WWE's future, company executives were faced with a renewed responsibility to ensure high levels of success on a consistent basis. And for McMahon, becoming the head of a publicly-traded company required a change in the creative philosophy he had employed for years.

"Believe it or not, I used to do a lot of things with my heart, as opposed to my head, because you get really close to talent," admits McMahon. "When you start making decisions with your heart instead of your head, you're not going to make very good business decisions. Now that we're a public company, I have no alternative. I have to answer to a board of directors; I have to answer to our stockholders."

NEW YORK STOCK EXCHANGE



After nearly one year of operating as a publicly traded company, WWE announced its shares would be listed on the New York Stock Exchange, as opposed to Nasdaq, beginning on October 25, 2000. The strategic step not only helped increase the company's visibility with investors, analysts, and fans, but also placed WWE alongside other iconic American brands being traded on the New York Stock Exchange, including Coca-Cola, General Electric, and Johnson & Johnson.

"The evolution of going from this stereotype of sweaty men in their underwear to being a publicly-traded company on the New York Stock Exchange, I think my grandfather's head might have exploded," says Stephanie McMahon regarding WWE's rise from a regional promotion into a global phenomenon.

RETAINING CONTROL

WWE's IPO made 15 percent of the company available to the public. The other 85 percent remains McMahon-held, with Vince being the primary stockholder. McMahon-held shares control 10-to-1 voting rights.

KING OF THE RING

TOURNAMENT

The most prestigious annual tournament in sports-entertainment history, the King of the Ring not only solidified many top stars' claims of greatness, such as Harley Race and Bret Hart, but also helped launch the careers of others, including Stone Cold Steve Austin and Owen Hart.

In 1993, the tournament made its pay-per-view debut, and remained one of the sports-entertainment calendar's most anticipated events through 2002. King of the Ring made returns in 2006, 2008, and 2010, where the crown was contested over at *Judgment Day* and on *Raw*.



Owen Hart crowned 1994 King by Jim Neidhart



Steve Austin, 1996 King of the Ring

Marc Mero kicked me in the mouth on a silly move (in the first match); they had to take me to the hospital in the middle of the pay-per-view to get 14 stitches in my lip. When I came back, the pay-per-view was still going on. Michael Hayes came up to me and said 'Steve, I just want you to know you're gonna wrestle Jake Roberts in the finals.'

— Stone Cold Steve Austin



66 Vince was adamant about making me wear this big, goofy, imperial marcher-man crown. He thought it was good. I thought it was ridiculous... So at the end of the match, I smashed Foley with the crown.

— Triple H



Triple H, 1997 King of the Ring

YEAR	KING	DEFEATED	CITY
1985	Don Muraco	The Iron Sheik	Foxborough, MA
1986	Harley Race	Pedro Morales	Foxborough, MA
1987	Randy Savage	King Kong Bundy	Providence, RI
1988	Ted DiBiase	Randy Savage	Providence, RI
1989	Tito Santana	Rick Martel	Providence, RI
1991	Bret Hart	I.R.S.	Providence, RI
1993	Bret Hart	Bam Bam Bigelow	Dayton, OH
1994	Owen Hart	Razor Ramon	Baltimore, MD
1995	Mabel	Savio Vega	Philadelphia, PA
1996	Steve Austin	Jake Roberts	Milwaukee, WI
1997	Triple H	Mankind	Providence, RI
1998	Ken Shamrock	The Rock	Pittsburgh, PA
1999	Billy Gunn	X-Pac	Greensboro, NC
2000	Kurt Angle	Rikishi	Boston, MA
2001	Edge	Kurt Angle	East Rutherford, NJ
2002	Brock Lesnar	Rob Van Dam	Columbus, OH
2006	Booker T	Bobby Lashley	Phoenix, AZ
2008	William Regal	CM Punk	Greenville, SC
2010	Sheamus	John Morrison	Philadelphia, PA

66 I knew it was a big steppingstone, and a bit of a test. I knew Stone Cold and Bret and those guys had won it, but I also knew that it didn't work for some guys, like Mabel and Billy Gunn... Not saying it was their fault, but it didn't. I knew there was a possibility of that with me, too. And, didn't want that. I wanted to show that I was ready.

— Edge



Booker T defeats Bobby Lashley to become King of the Ring in 2006

66 For me to make King Booker the best I possibly could, I had to do my research. I found that all the kings that came before me, they just won the tournament, but they really didn't act like a king, so I was like, 'Man, I really want to make this special because I want people to remember one hundred years from now when they think about the King of the Ring tournament, the first king that they think about is King Booker, the most royal king of them all, the most majestic king of them all.'

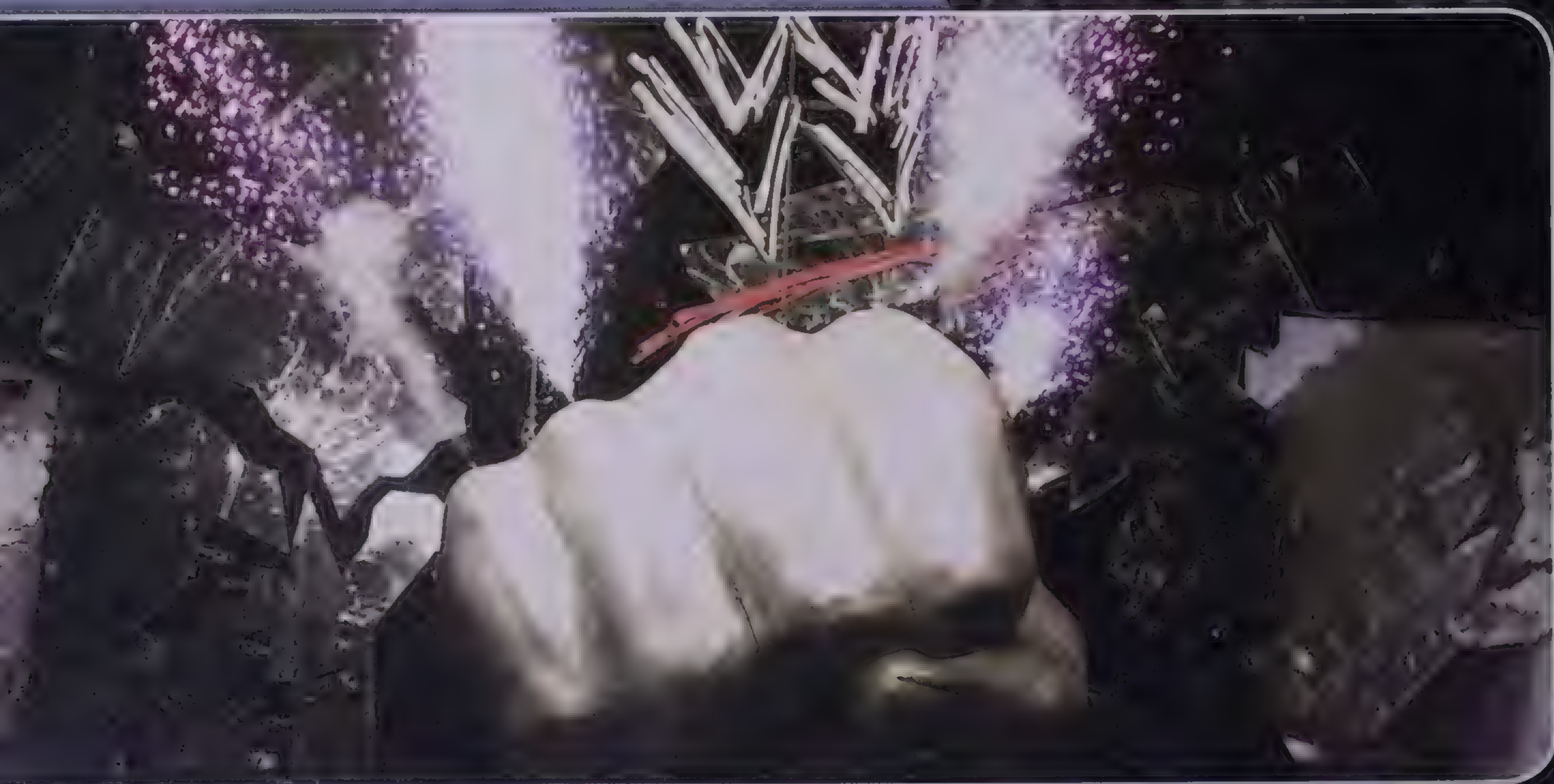
"As far as the accent goes, I studied *The Last King of Scotland* with Forest Whitaker. I was a big fan of his gestures and the way he did things. The pinky was just my own special touch to add. It was great, it was grand, it was the best time of my life to actually go to England and go to Buckingham Palace and have people on the street to bow down to King Booker because if I believed it, they believed it. And that's really what it was all about.

— Booker T





SMACK[®] DOWN



The landscape of WWE could not have looked more fruitful in the Spring of 1999. The Attitude Era was in full swing, *Raw* was crushing *Nitro* in the ratings, and sports-entertainment fans simply could not get enough of the WWE product. WWE responded to the overwhelming demand by creating a special two-hour pilot episode of *SmackDown*, a name derived from one of The Rock's many popular catchphrases.

Hailing from Connecticut's now-demolished New Haven Coliseum, the *SmackDown* pilot featured a star-studded main event that saw Stone Cold Steve Austin team with The Rock to battle Undertaker and Triple H. The response was remarkable; *SmackDown* scored a whopping 5.8 overnight rating, which prompted UPN to add the new show to its regular weekly programming. Its home: Thursday nights, opposite of WCW's *Thunder* on TBS.

The Rock battles Triple H in the debut of SmackDown



DID YOU KNOW?

Prior to producing the pilot episode of *SmackDown*, WWE contemplated launching the show as a Divas-only program. Potential names for the show included:

- ▶ *WWE Ring Skirts*
- ▶ *WWE Leather & Lace*
- ▶ *WWE Femme Fatales*
- ▶ *WWE Titans in Lace*
- ▶ *WWE Female Fury*
- ▶ *WWE GlamSlam*

"I didn't like the fact that they wanted to put us on Thursday night," admits Vince McMahon. "We wanted a night other than Thursday, but UPN, in terms of their research, didn't care and we were getting a rights fee for it, so we made the pilot and they picked us up. When you're working with a network, you don't dictate to them. It's not like Turner; Turner could move programming anywhere he wanted to. He owned the networks."

On August 26, 1999, WWE made its return to network television when the first regularly scheduled *SmackDown* aired on UPN. Like the pilot, the show proved to be a ratings success. The momentum carried well into the Fall, thanks in large part to the show's unpredictable nature. In the first few months alone, Mr. McMahon captured the WWE Championship, Jeff Jarrett flattened 76 year old Fabulous Moolah with a guitar, and Big Boss Man crashed the funeral of Big Show's father.

While fans and executives alike were all pleased with the new product, there was one key cog in the WWE machine that failed to share the same enjoyment over *SmackDown*'s creation. Vince Russo, WWE's lead creative writer at the time, was reportedly growing frustrated with the increased workload *SmackDown* represented. Additionally, he began to feel underappreciated for the role he was playing in WWE's success.

"A lot of the credit was going to Vince [McMahon] and that pissed me off because I knew I was working my backside off," claims Russo. "It also started to trigger in me; I started to ask myself if I could do this without Vince, if I could be successful on my own."

Russo's inner debate eventually led to him abruptly quitting WWE to join rival WCW in late 1999. At the time, WCW's popularity was clearly on the decline, which gave Russo the opportunity to prove his worth by resurrecting the struggling promotion, similar to how WWE rebounded years earlier. But that never happened. *Nitro* continued its slide under Russo, and *Thunder* quickly moved from Thursday to Wednesday nights where *SmackDown* could not negatively impact its potential viewership.



Vince Russo with Kevin Nash on WCW Thunder



Edge sets up for the Spear

"I don't look at it like, 'Oh wow, I knocked them out of Thursday night, way to go,' McMahon modestly recalls. "That's not why we were on Thursday night to begin with. Maybe it was better for us since we had the potential for a whole audience. But you have to make business decisions based on good business, not on what I or anyone else would want in terms of 'those rotten bastards, they deserve this.' That's not good business."

A NEW LOOK

During its first year, *SmackDown* became recognizable for its oval entranceway and similarly shaped video screen. The distinct appearance helped set the show apart from *Raw* and its giant rectangular video screen. But as *SmackDown* neared its second anniversary, it was time for a change. WWE arranged for the signature look of the old set to go out with a bang by having Rhyno deliver a rib-rattling Gore to Chris Jericho that sent both Superstars crashing through the set.

With the oval set reduced to scraps, WWE quickly introduced a new-and-improved look, which featured a giant fist crashing through glass mirrors above the entranceway. The fist was so large that it required its own semi-trailer truck when being transported between cities.

For the following six-plus years, the fist was synonymous with *SmackDown*'s success. It wasn't until January 2008 that the oversized extremity was retired in favor of WWE's new high-definition set.





Mr. Kennedy!...
Kennedy!



Big Show and Brock Lesnar demolish
the ring on June 12, 2003



NEW NIGHT, NEW NETWORK

SmackDown began to undergo a series of programming changes starting in the Fall of 2005. First, UPN shifted the show from Thursday to Friday nights. Then, the following year, *SmackDown* moved to a new network, The CW. From a timing standpoint, the switch to CW couldn't have come at a more challenging time. With Major League Baseball playing out the end of its season, CW was contractually obligated to air games on Fridays, causing *SmackDown* to oftentimes be preempted in certain markets. But rather than sit back and accept what would be almost certain long-term ratings damage, WWE put an even bigger spotlight on the brand's champion, King Booker, franchise players Undertaker and Batista, and young upstart Bobby Lashley.



By accentuating its positives, *SmackDown* became one of CW's highest-rated programs. But the WWE-CW relationship didn't last long. In October 2008, the blue brand found another new home on MyNetworkTV. For MyNetworkTV, the inclusion of *SmackDown* offered instant credibility and helped catapult them ahead of rival CW in the ratings. Behind the intrigue of a unique Triple Threat Match featuring WWE Champion Triple H versus World Heavyweight Champion Chris Jericho versus ECW Champion Matt Hardy, the initial *SmackDown* on MyNetworkTV drove the most viewers in the history of the network and resulted in a whopping 217 percent ratings increase over the same Friday the year prior.



*Rey Mysterio's
WWE debut on
July 25, 2002*



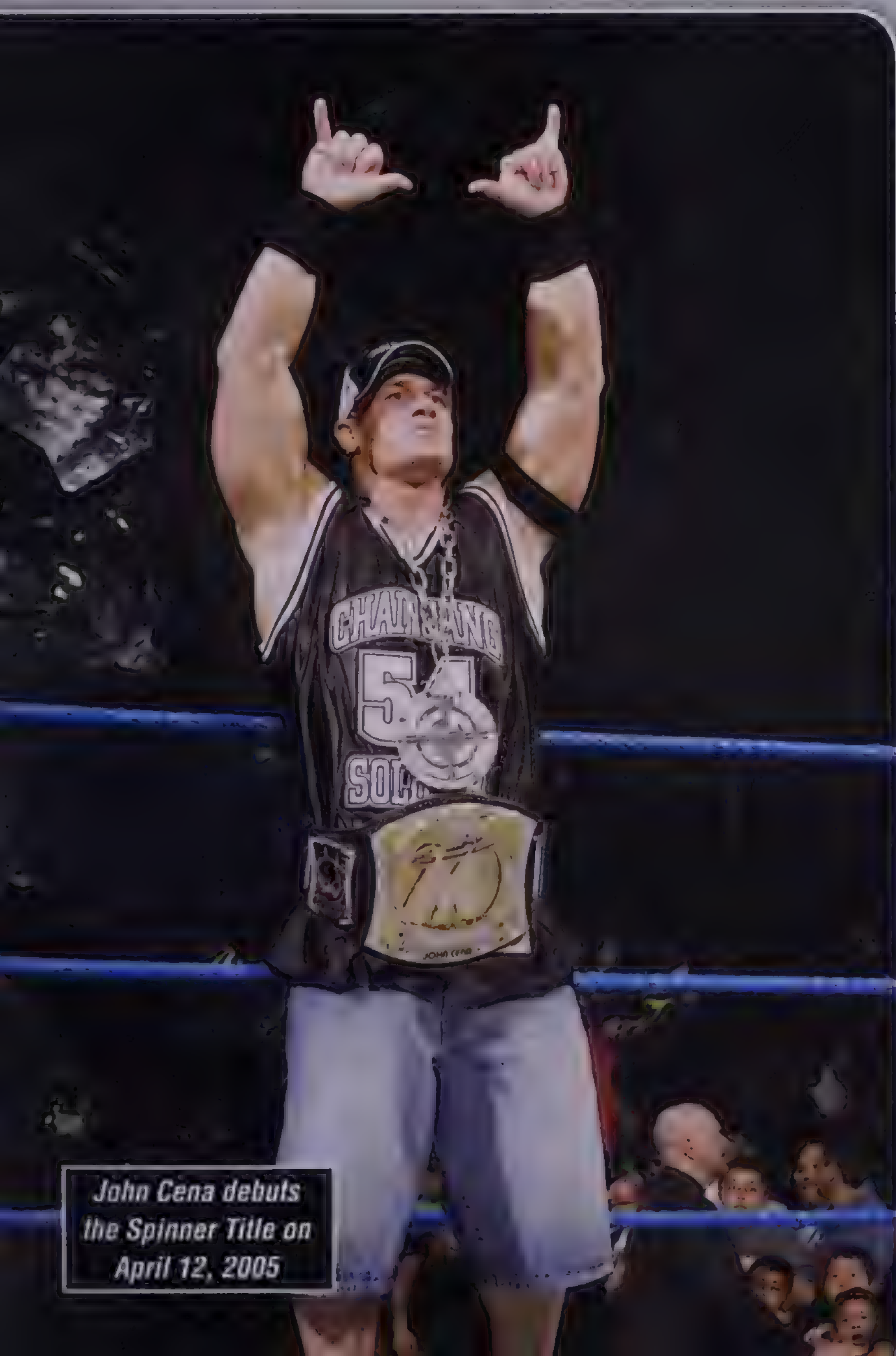
*Batista forfeits the World Heavyweight
Championship on January 10, 2006*

SmackDown stayed on MyNetworkTV until October 2010, when it jumped to its current home on SyFy. On its SyFy debut, *SmackDown* featured Kane battling John Cena to a No Contest, and Undertaker topping CM Punk. For Punk, the loss hurt more than usual, considering what could've been.

"The debut of *SmackDown* on SyFy was supposed to be a huge wedding, me and Serena. God knows Vince loves weddings, back to Uncle Elmer," says Punk. "But she tanked the whole thing; I can't say it enough. I don't want to sit here and boo boo face and bash Serena, but what she did can't be undone. I've gotten apologies and all that, but you can't believe somebody who'd lie to your face. I'd ask her if she'd been drinking. She'd say 'no.'

"Okay, I'm not your dad. I'm not your counselor. I can't control you. But you told me you were going to do one thing, and you did the opposite," I said. It led to her getting fired. Wake up! But I wish her the best."

Nearly 15 years after its inception, *SmackDown* remains a major force in the sports-entertainment world, as well as a key influencer of pop culture. Thanks to the WWE Universe, *SmackDown* has solidified a permanent place in everyday vernacular. Closing in on 800 episodes, the "blue brand" is sure to deliver countless unforgettable moments for years to come.



John Cena debuts
the Spinner Title on
April 12, 2005



Big Show takes off
CM Punk's mask on
July 17, 2010



Jack Swagger cashes in
Money In The Bank
on April 23, 2010

WRESTLEMANIA

2000-22



Venue: Arrowhead Pond – Anaheim, CA

Attendance: 18,742

WRESTLEMANIA 2000

APRIL 2, 2000

For the decade and a half leading into *WrestleMania 2000*, fans were *always* treated to a happy ending, highlighted by their favorites ultimately walking away victorious. Then came *WrestleMania 2000*. With a McMahon in every corner, the reviled Triple H walked in *and out* of the event with the WWE Championship. In doing so, The Game (with Stephanie McMahon) turned back The Rock (with Mr. McMahon), Big Show (with Shane McMahon), and Mick Foley (with Linda McMahon).

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Triple H (c) defeated The Rock, Mick Foley, and Big Show



You can look back in the history and see that New York and WWE was always known as two things: a big-man territory and a babyface territory. It was always that way. Vince's dad and Vince were a heel factory. They built bad guys, they fed them to their babyface, and they moved on.

*I was the first guy to come along and I think make myself a household name as a bad guy. I think the only other bad guy that I can remember from my era of watching was Flair, and prior to that were guys like Killer Kowalski, who trained me. It was a very rare thing for me to be in that position as a heel and be so hot that nobody questioned my reign continuing through *WrestleMania*. It wasn't a foregone conclusion that the good guy was going to win at *WrestleMania*.*

— Triple H



HARDCORE CHAMPIONSHIP:

- › Hardcore Holly won a Hardcore Battle Royal
- › Test and Albert defeated Al Snow and Steve Blackman

WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP LADDER MATCH:

- › Edge and Christian defeated the Hardys and the Dudleys (c)

INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP:

- › Chris Benoit defeated Chris Jericho and Kurt Angle (c)

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP:

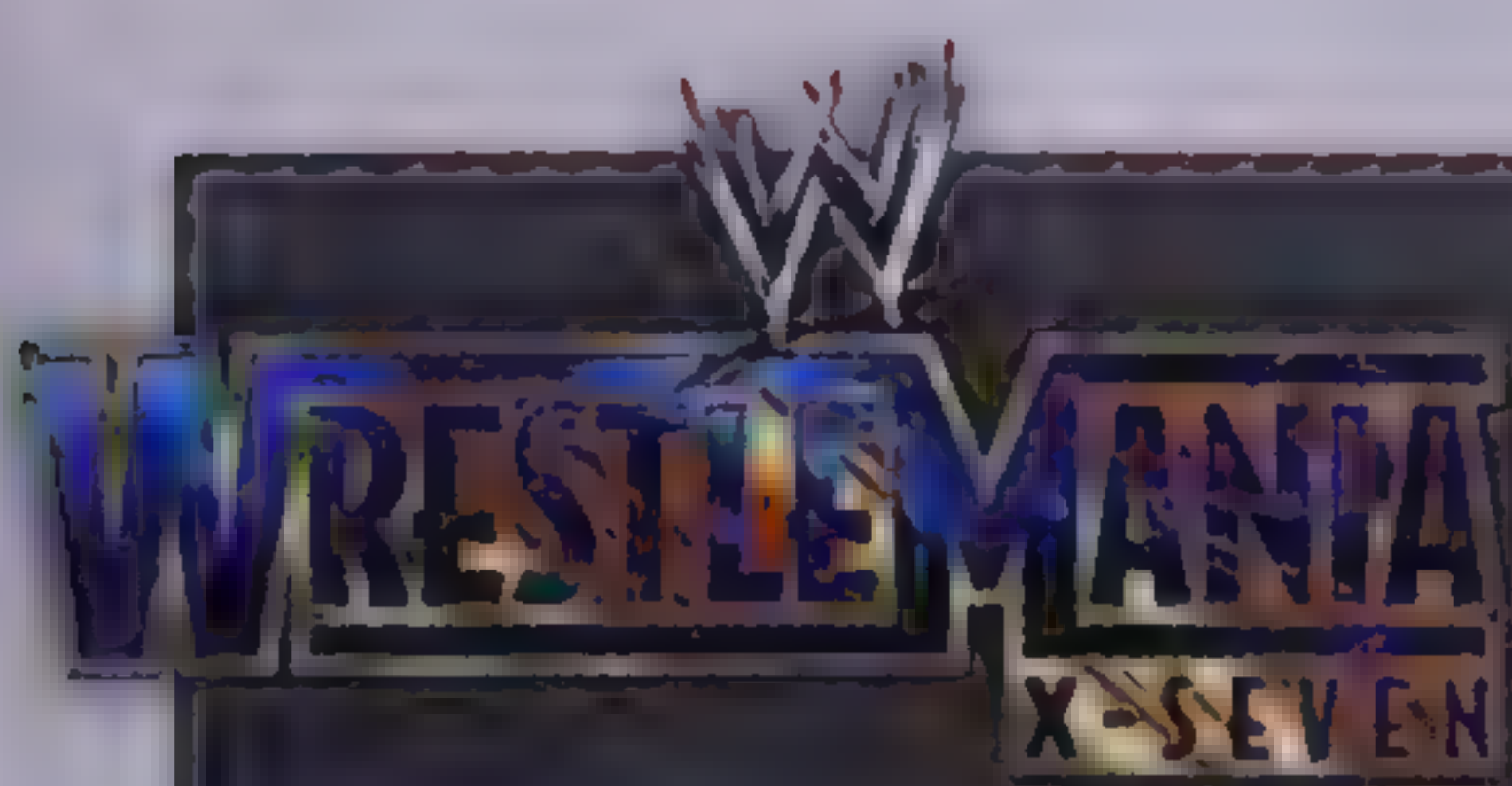
- › Chris Jericho defeated Chris Benoit and Kurt Angle (c)

OTHER MATCHES:

- › Big Boss Man and Bull Buchanan defeated The Godfather and D-Lo Brown
- › Terri defeated The Kat
- › Too Cool and Chyna defeated The Radicalz
- › Kane and Rikishi defeated Road Dogg and X-Pac

DID YOU KNOW?

The match between Terri and The Kat marks the only time in *WrestleMania* history where there was only one 1-1 match.



Venue: Astrodome – Houston, TX

Attendance: 67,925

WRESTLEMANIA X-SEVEN

APRIL 1, 2001

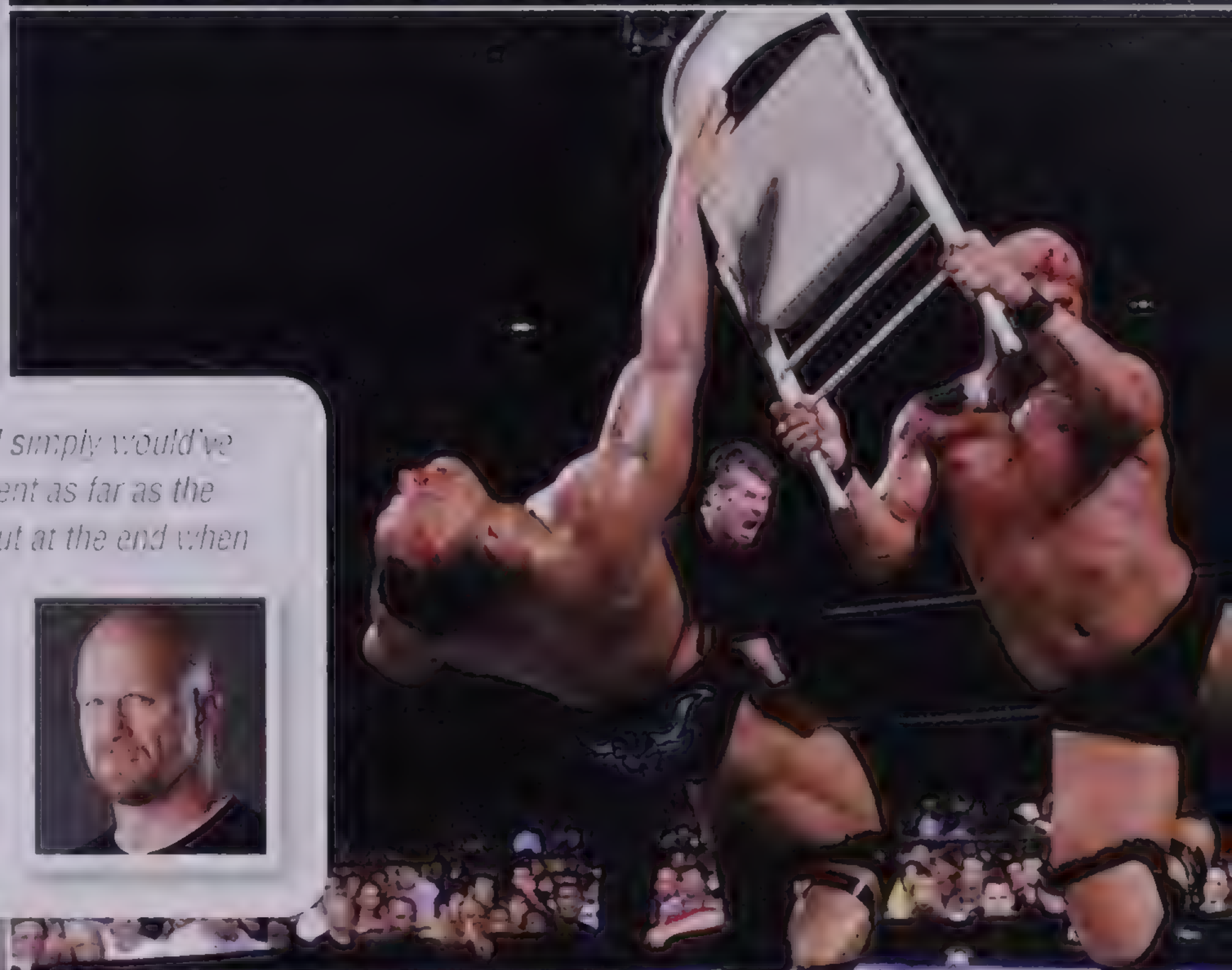
For the first time in nearly a decade, *WrestleMania* returned to a domed stadium when WWE brought its crown jewel to Houston's Astrodome. Nearly 70,000 fans packed the venue to witness what many believe to be one of the greatest *WrestleManias* of all time. In the main event, Stone Cold Steve Austin dethroned WWE Champion The Rock in a shockingly dastardly fashion when he nearly crippled The Great One with a steel chair before pinning him. After the match, Austin celebrated the victory by sharing a beer with his longtime nemesis Mr. McMahon. To this day, the sight of Stone Cold and Mr. McMahon aligning at *WrestleMania X-Seven* remains one of the most surreal scenes in WWE history.

“If I could go back in time, I would have never turned heel that night. I simply would've beaten The Rock the same way with the chair. I would've done nothing different as far as the execution of that match. It was peerless. It was flawless, a five-star match. But at the end when Vince McMahon got in that ring and stuck out his hand, I would have looked at him, kicked him in his gut, and dropped him on his chin. It would have been all I needed to send me off into another stratosphere of being a white-hot babyface. That's looking back now. If I can turn back time, I wouldn't have turned heel. I would have Stunned Vince. But I was dead set on being a heel at that time.”

— Stone Cold Steve Austin

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

▶ Stone Cold Steve Austin defeated The Rock (c)



INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP:

▶ Chris Jericho (c) defeated William Regal

HARDCORE CHAMPIONSHIP:

▶ Kane defeated Big Show and Raven (c)

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP: ▶ Eddie Guerrero defeated Test (c)

WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP: ▶ Chyna defeated Ivory (c)

STREET FIGHT: ▶ Shane McMahon defeated Mr. McMahon

WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP TLC MATCH:

▶ Edge and Christian defeated the Hardys and the Dudleys (c)

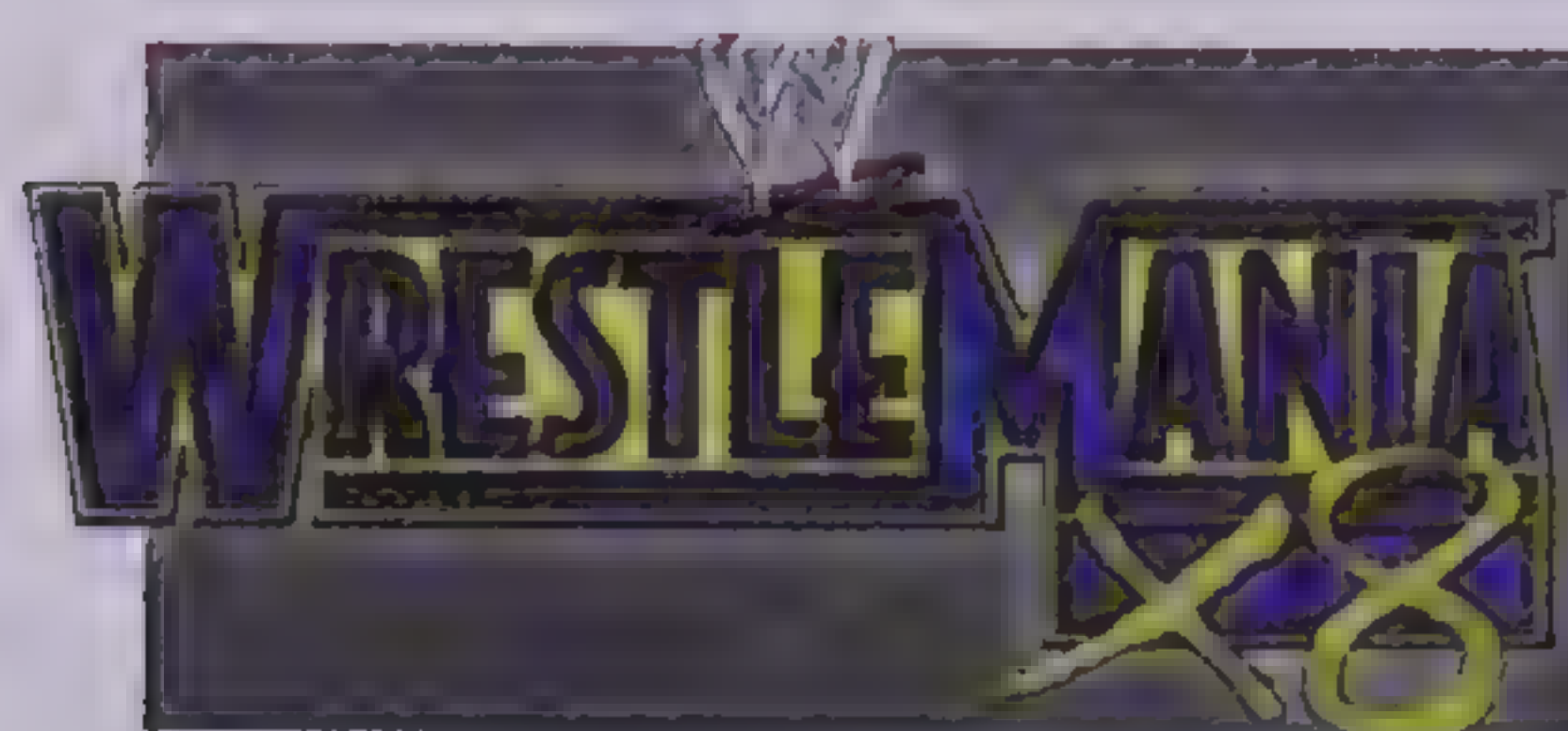
GIMMICK BATTLE ROYAL: ▶ The Iron Sheik won

OTHER MATCHES:

▶ APA and Tazz defeated Right to Censor

▶ Kurt Angle defeated Chris Benoit

▶ Undertaker defeated Triple H



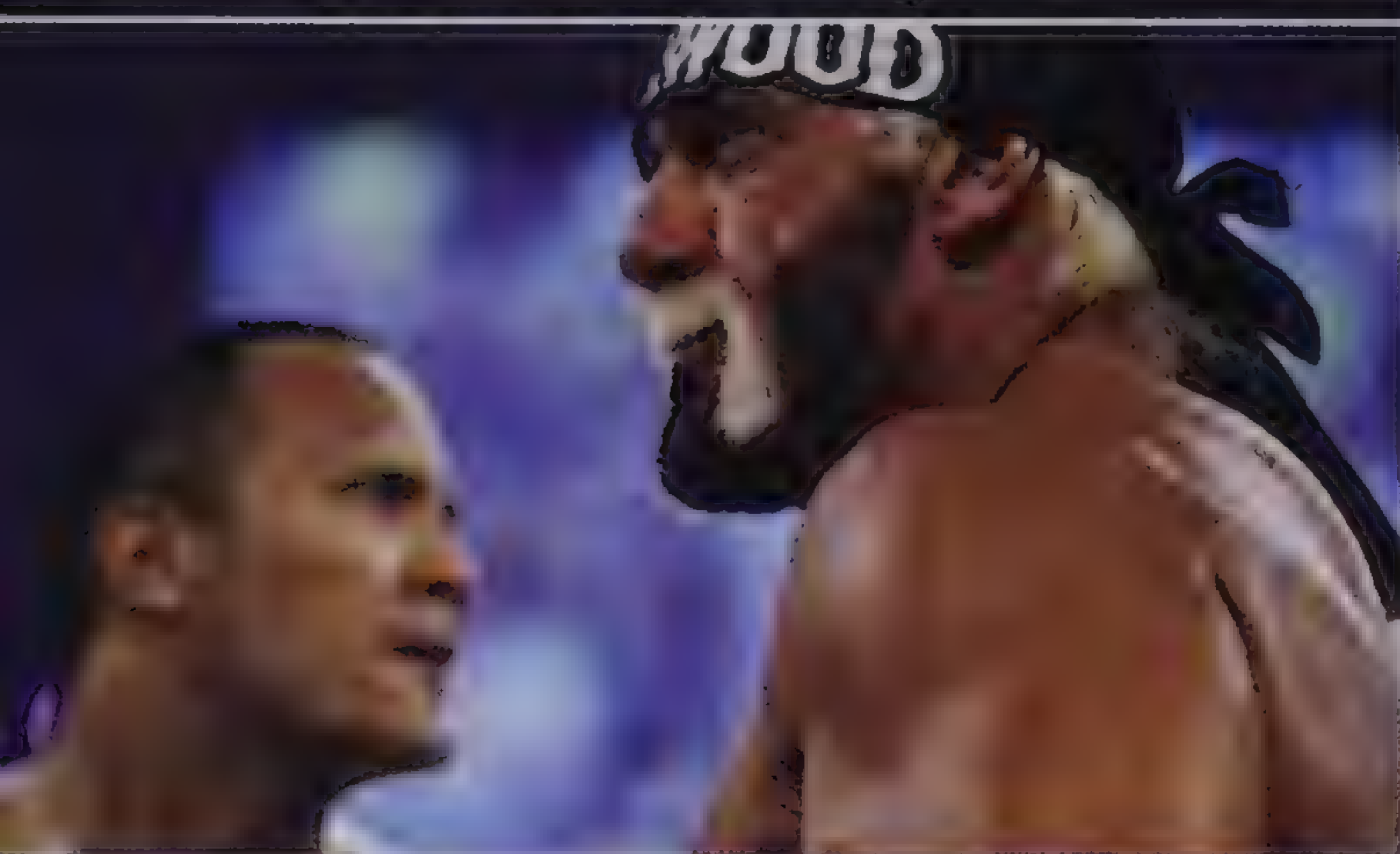
WRESTLEMANIA X8
MARCH 17, 2002

Venue: Skydome – Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Attendance: 68,237

For the second time ever, *WrestleMania* crossed the border in 2002 when Toronto's SkyDome played host to the annual spectacular. The event will forever be remembered as the site of the momentous Icon vs. Icon Match, which saw The Rock top Hulk Hogan in a truly epic contest. And in the main event, Triple H, who had suffered a career-threatening quadriceps injury the prior year, triumphed over Undisputed WWE Champion Chris Jericho, who was accompanied by The Game's then-estranged wife, Stephanie McMahon.

› The Rock defeated Hulk Hogan



INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Rob Van Dam defeated William Regal (c)

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP:

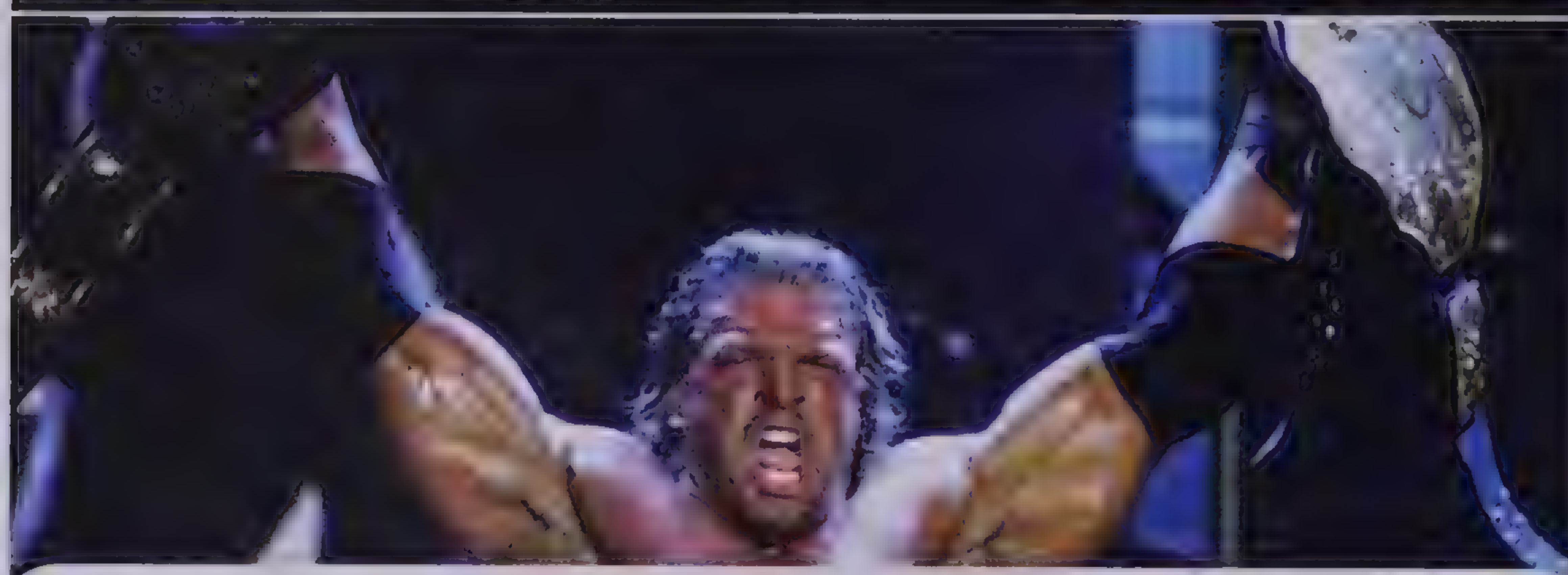
› Diamond Dallas Page (c) defeated Christian

HARDCORE CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Spike Dudley, Hurricane, Mighty Molly, Maven, and Christian all scored pinfalls to become champion throughout the night

UNDISPUTED CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Triple H defeated Chris Jericho (c)



“Being a part of that night was a really humbling experience, especially to be in there with somebody that you love so much. It magnifies all of the emotion, it magnifies the adrenaline, it magnifies the uniqueness of the experience. This is my family's business. My great grandfather started it. Clearly there were other promotions, but being a part of the WWE is humbling in and of itself. Then being in the ring at *WrestleMania*, the event my father created with the love of my life who just returned from a yearlong injury, where he suffered every day to get back to the people, it was remarkable.”

— Stephanie McMahon



WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Billy and Chuck (c) defeated the Hardys, the APA, and the Dudleys

WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Jazz (c) defeated Lita and Trish

OTHER MATCHES:

› Kurt Angle defeated Kane

› Undertaker defeated Ric Flair

› Edge defeated Booker T

› Stone Cold defeated Scott Hall



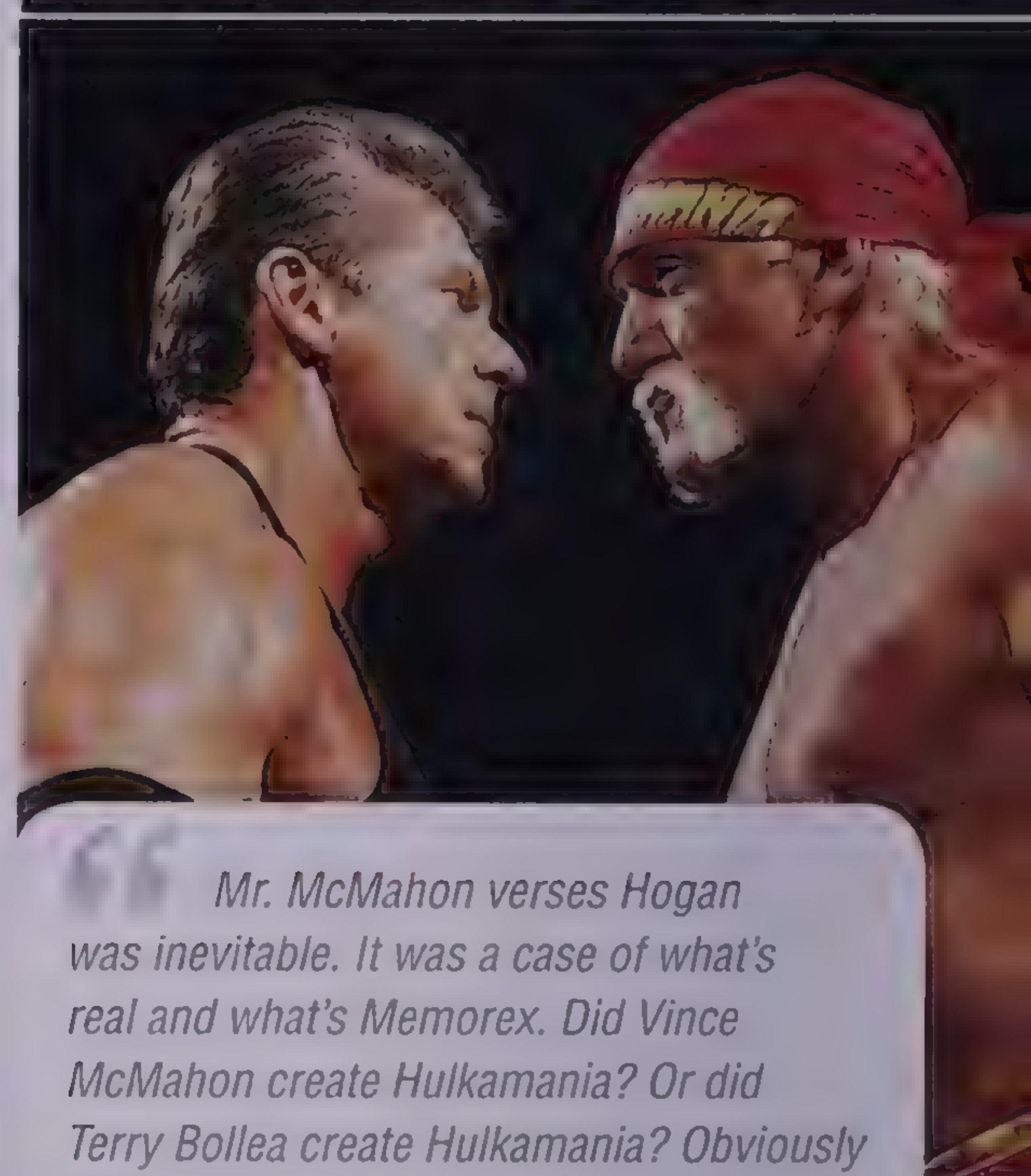
Venue: Safeco Field – Seattle, WA

Attendance: 54,097

WrestleMania XIX also featured a match two decades in the making: Mr. McMahon vs. Hulk Hogan. Together, McMahon and Hogan revolutionized the sports-entertainment business, starting in the early-to-mid 1980s. Twenty years later, however, McMahon insisted that he was the sole creator of Hulkamania and vowed to destroy it at *WrestleMania*. Luckily for Hulkamaniacs everywhere, The Hulkster dropped his big leg over McMahon in the end and picked up the victory.

STREET FIGHT:

› Hulk Hogan defeated Mr. McMahon



“Mr. McMahon verses Hogan was inevitable. It was a case of what's real and what's Memorex. Did Vince McMahon create Hulkamania? Or did Terry Bollea create Hulkamania? Obviously it's a combination, as it always is. Both characters had and have huge egos. And there were times where I wish I could choke him and at *WrestleMania*. I had the opportunity. And I'm sure there is no question that Hogan felt I had caused him a great deal of consternation and he would like to choke me. So there we were. And I dare say after the match was over, we had more respect for each other than going in, which is saying something.”

— Vince McMahon



WRESTLEMANIA XIX

MARCH 30, 2003



WRESTLEMANIA XX

MARCH 14, 2004

When Stone Cold Steve Austin and The Rock squared off at *WrestleMania XV*, nobody could've predicted that the match would serve as the foundation of what would arguably become the greatest rivalry in the history of *WrestleMania*. Four years later at *WrestleMania XIX*, their epic war culminated with a Rock victory over Stone Cold in their third and final *WrestleMania* contest.

› The Rock defeated Stone Cold Steve Austin



CRUISERWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Matt Hardy (c) defeated Rey Mysterio

WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Trish Stratus defeated Jazz and Victoria (c)

WWE TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Team Angle (c) defeated Chris Benoit and Rhyno and Los Guerreros

WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Triple H (c) defeated Booker T

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Brock Lesnar defeated Kurt Angle (c)

OTHER MATCHES:

- › Undertaker defeated Big Show and A-Train
- › Shawn Michaels defeated Chris Jericho
- › Stacy Keibler, Torrie Wilson, and the Miller Light Cat Fight Girls fought to a no contest

Venue: Madison Square Garden – New York, NY

Attendance: 18,500

Twenty years earlier, Vince McMahon had a vision to create an event so grand that it would change the landscape of sports-entertainment forever. That event: *WrestleMania*. The venue: Madison Square Garden. Nearly two decades later, WWE brought *WrestleMania* back to its original home, MSG, for *WrestleMania XX*. The event celebrated the *WrestleMania* debuts for future WWE Champions John Cena, Randy Orton, and Batista. It also marked the departure of Brock Lesnar and Goldberg, who both left WWE following *WrestleMania*. News of their departures leaked to the public shortly before the event, resulting in many fans feeling jilted by the exiting Superstars. To show their dissatisfaction with Lesnar and Goldberg leaving, members of the WWE Universe in attendance at MSG showered both Superstars with deafening chants throughout the entire contest, including "Goldberg sucks," "this match sucks," and "boring," among others. One thing fans did not find boring, however, was the epic return of Undertaker as the Deadman character who captured their imaginations throughout the 90s. The demon from Death Valley returned to his roots to defeat his brother, Kane.

U.S. CHAMPIONSHIP:

› John Cena defeated Big Show (c)

WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Booker T and Rob Van Dam (c) defeated La Resistance, Mark Jindrak and Garrison Cade, and the Dudleys

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Eddie Guerrero (c) defeated Kurt Angle



EVENING GOWN MATCH:

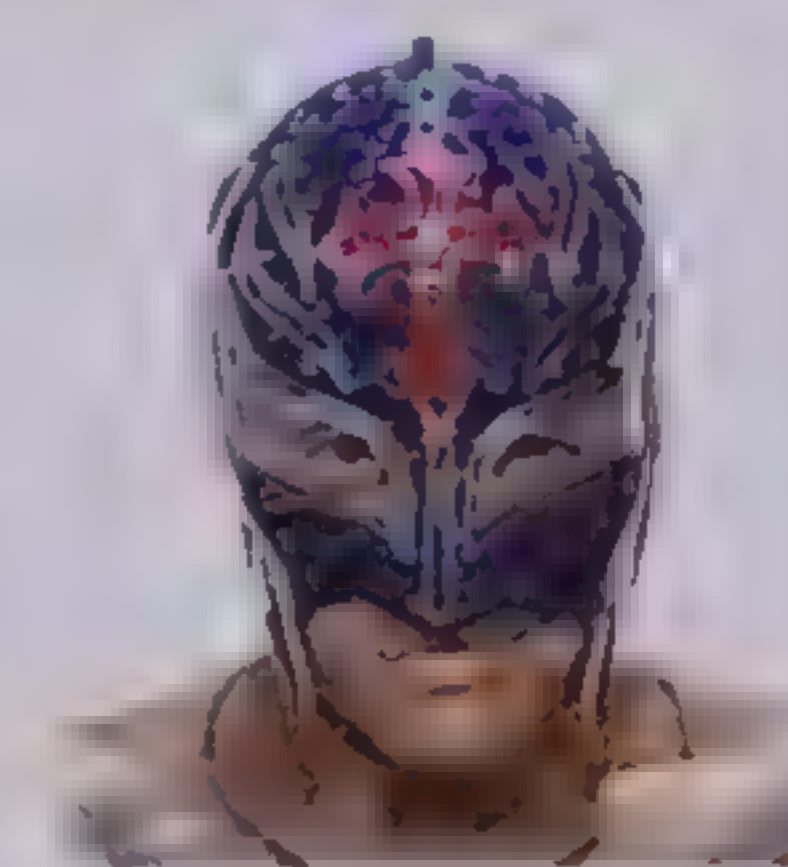
› Sable and Torrie Wilson defeated Stacy Keibler and Miss Jackie

CRUISERWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Chavo Guerrero (c) won a Cruiserweight Open

56 [Goldberg, Lesnar] stood out to me because we were expecting a good match. I think the locker room was expecting a good match or something unique, and the New York crowd has always been a very hard crowd to please. It was just so unsatisfying for the fans: they were expecting something else and they just took over the match at that point. That really stood out to me.

— Rey Mysterio



WWE TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Scotty 2 Hotty and Rikishi (c) defeated Basham Brothers, World's Greatest Tag Team, and APA

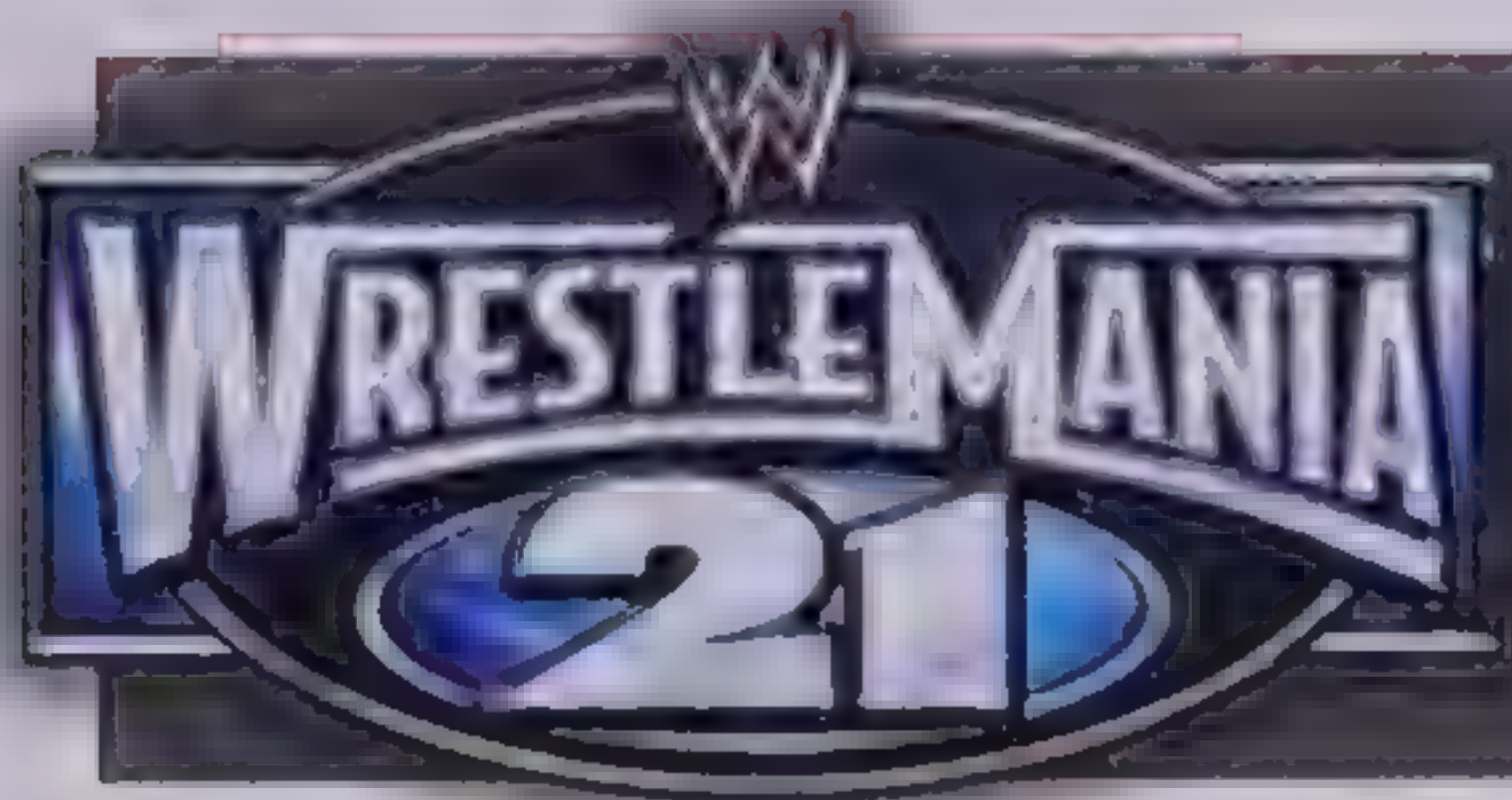
WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP: › Victoria (c) defeated Molly Holly

WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Chris Benoit defeated Triple H (c) and Shawn Michaels

OTHER MATCHES:

- › Christian defeated Chris Jericho
- › Goldberg defeated Brock Lesnar
- › Randy Orton, Batista, and Ric Flair defeated The Rock and Mick Foley
- › Undertaker defeated Kane



WRESTLEMANIA 21
APRIL 3, 2005

Venue: STAPLES Center – Los Angeles, CA

Attendance: 20,193

By April 2005, John Cena had cemented himself as sports-entertainment's next big Superstar. With a list of accomplishments that already included the United States Championship, the starring role in *The Marine*, soaring merchandise sales, and a debut rap album preparing to drop, the only missing accolade preventing him from calling himself the top star was the WWE Championship. At *WrestleMania 21*, in the night's second-to-last match, Cena was finally officially anointed the top spot when he claimed the WWE Title from JBL.

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

John Cena defeated JBL (c)



*I thought it was completely wrong to have Cena go on in the semi-main event role at *WrestleMania 21*. You can say it was two main events, but I disagree. Cena had the opportunity to have someone like 50 Cent rap him in; I thought Cena should have done that. Cena was the guy who was going to carry our company; he was the guy who, in hindsight, has carried our company. Cena was the guy who was going to do the movies, the rap album...he was going to be the face of WWE. To not have him close the show and to have the last image you see at *WrestleMania 21* not be Cena with the title above his head was a debacle. I think it was wrong, I thought it was wrong at the time and in hindsight, I think it is wrong now. I think [it] was very short sighted.*

— JBL



MONEY IN THE BANK LADDER MATCH:

Edge defeated Chris Benoit, Shelton Benjamin, Chris Jericho, Christian, and Kane

WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP:

Trish Stratus (c) defeated Christy Hemme

SUMO MATCH:

Akebono defeated Big Show

WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP:

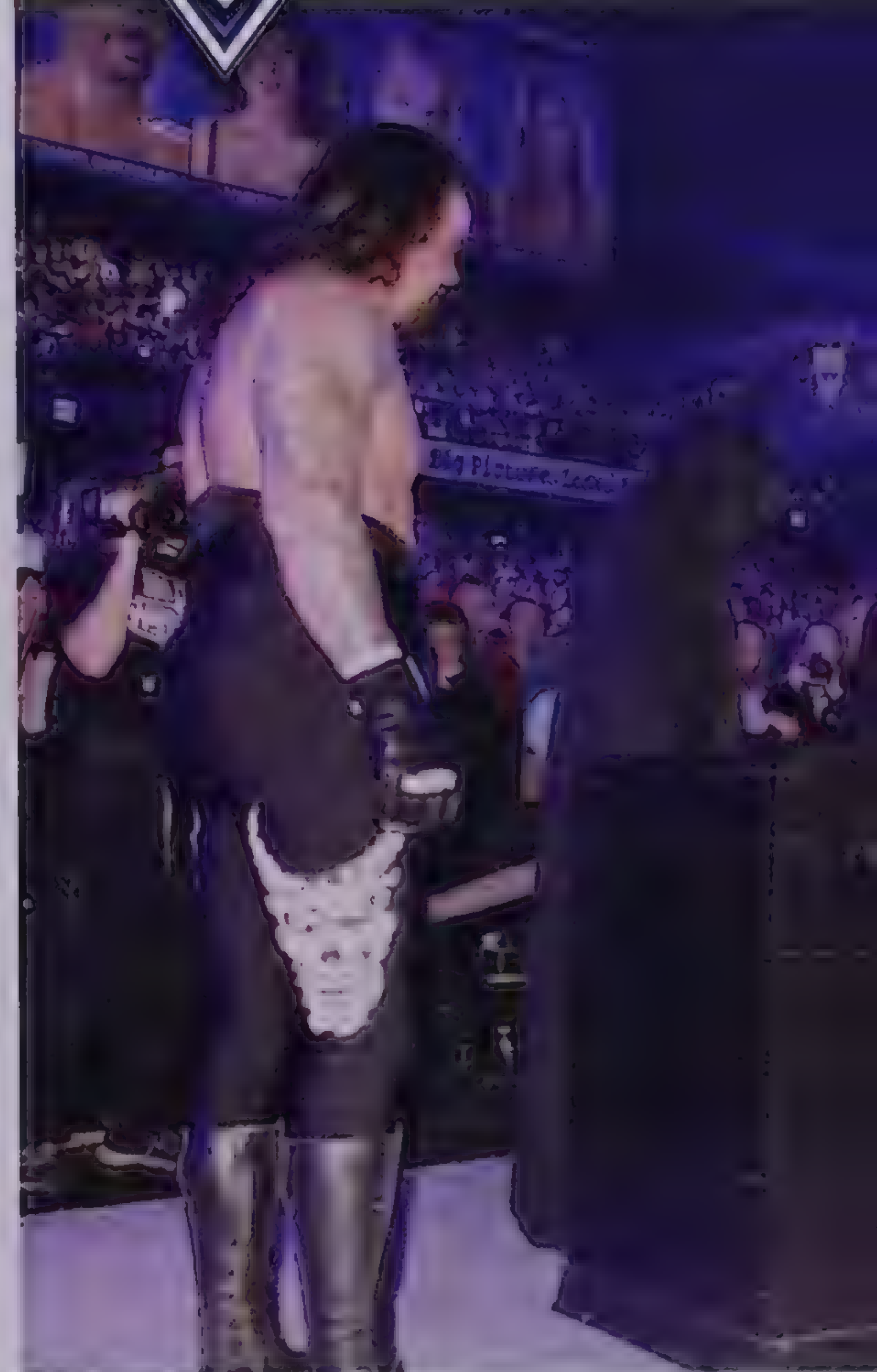
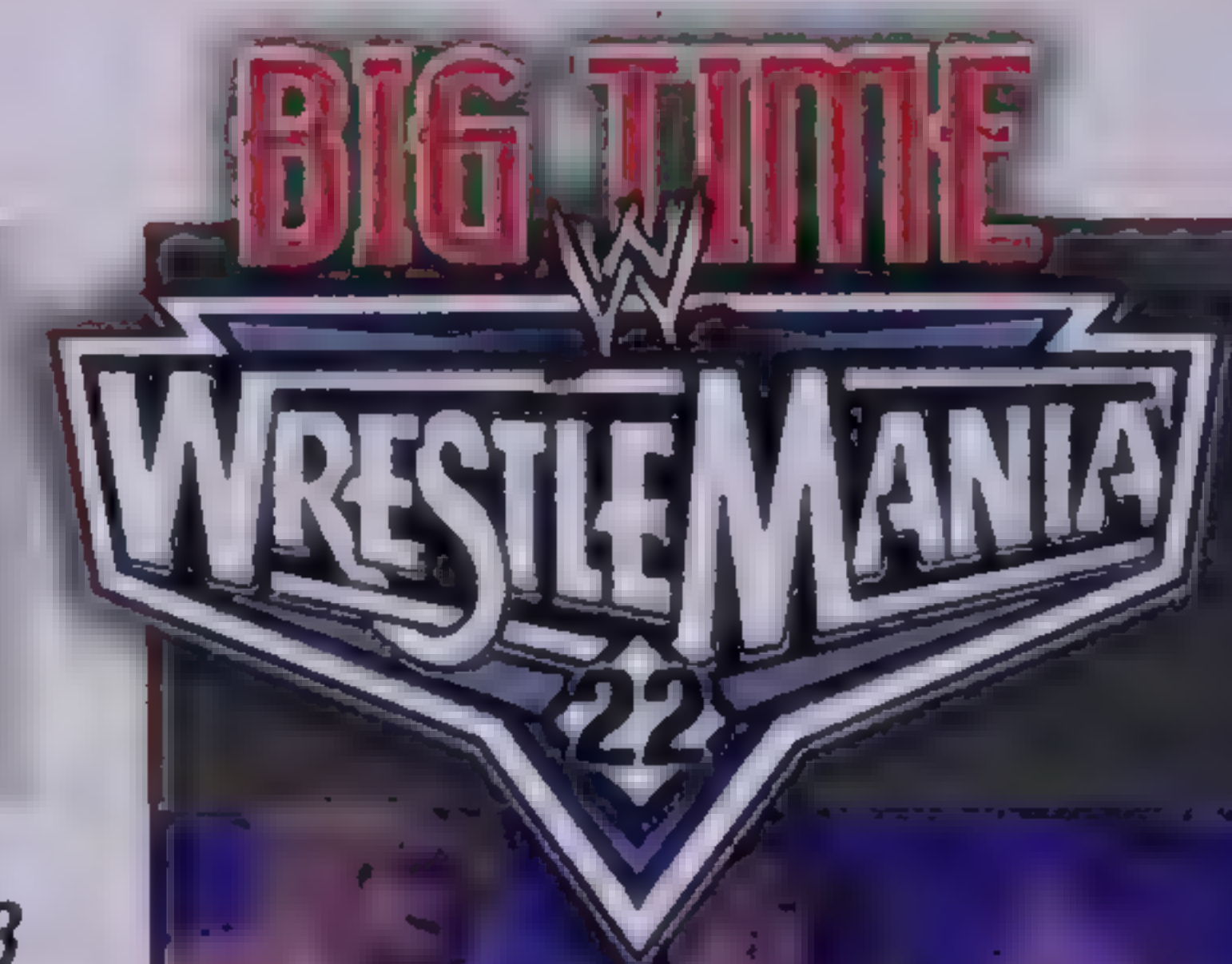
Batista defeated Triple H (c)

OTHER MATCHES:

Rey Mysterio defeated Eddie Guerrero

Undertaker defeated Randy Orton

Kurt Angle defeated Shawn Michaels



CASKET MATCH:

Undertaker defeated Mark Henry

WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP:

Big Show and Kane (c) defeated Carlito and Chris Masters

MONEY IN THE BANK LADDER MATCH:

Rob Van Dam defeated Shelton Benjamin, Ric Flair, Finlay, Matt Hardy, and Bobby Lashley

UNITED STATES CHAMPIONSHIP:

JBL defeated Chris Benoit (c)

HARDCORE MATCH:

Edge defeated Mick Foley

WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP:

Mickie James defeated Trish Stratus (c)

PLAYBOY PILLOW FIGHT:

Torrie Wilson defeated Candice Michelle

OTHER MATCHES:

The Boogeyman defeated Booker T and Sharmell

Shawn Michaels defeated Mr. McMahon

Venue: Allstate Arena – Rosemont, IL

Attendance: 17,159

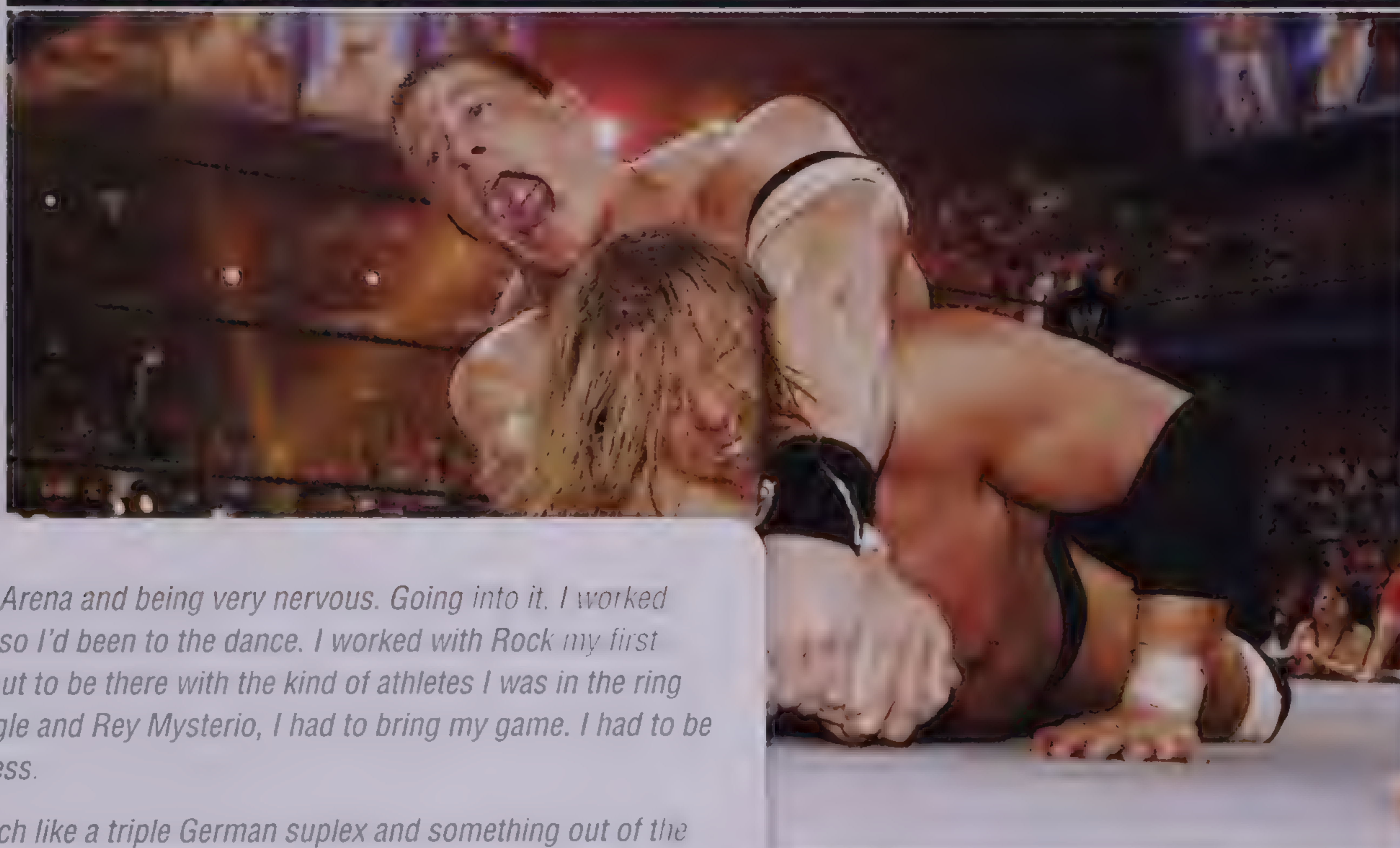
WRESTLEMANIA 22

APRIL 2, 2006

In what has thus far proved to be the final time, *WrestleMania* returned to an intimate arena setting when the Chicago area's Allstate Arena hosted the 22nd annual event. Despite the smaller setting, *WrestleMania 22* had a "Big Time" feel, thanks in large part to the all-star lineup of matches, which included Shawn Michaels defeating Mr. McMahon, Undertaker closing the lid on Mark Henry in a Casket Match, Edge beating hardcore legend Mick Foley at his own game, WWE Champion John Cena turning back Triple H, and Rey Mysterio capturing the World Heavyweight Championship from Kurt Angle in a Triple Threat Match that also included Randy Orton.

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

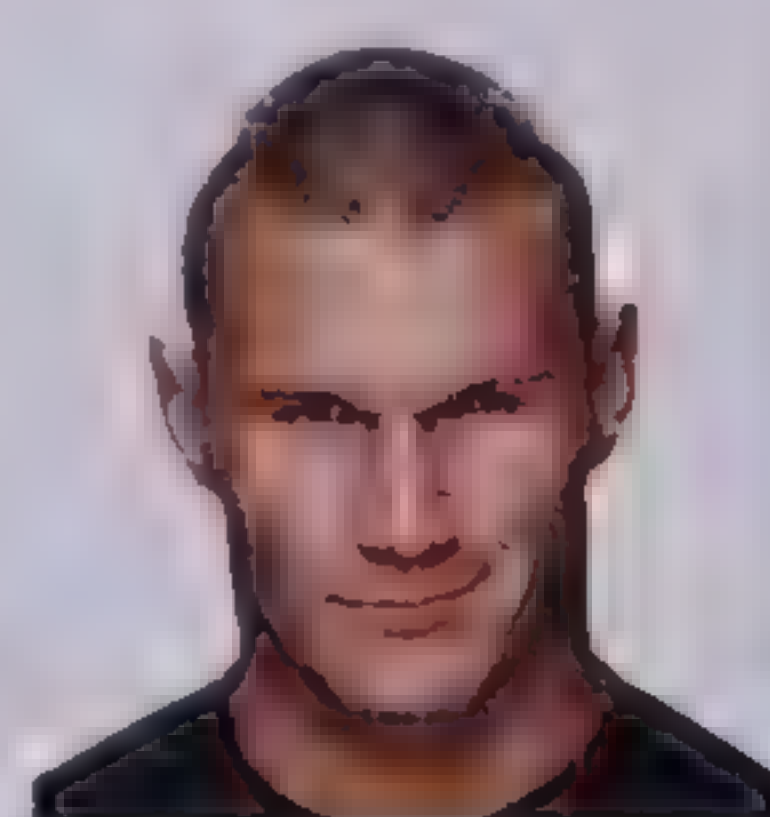
John Cena (c) defeated Triple H



66 I remember being at Allstate Arena and being very nervous. Going into it, I worked with the Undertaker the year before, so I'd been to the dance. I worked with Rock my first *WrestleMania*, so I had been there; but to be there with the kind of athletes I was in the ring with, Olympic gold medalist Kurt Angle and Rey Mysterio, I had to bring my game. I had to be 100 percent that night and nothing less.

I remember we did spots in that match like a triple German suplex and something out of the corner where Kurt popped Rey over his head, I was sitting on top of the turnbuckle and Rey did a Frankensteiner right over Kurt and I had never done that before, that's not really shtick. I'm not taking all the big bumps. That's really not my style, but that night it was and everything went alright. That's definitely one of my favorite matches.

— Randy Orton



WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP : Rey Mysterio defeated Randy Orton and Kurt Angle (c)

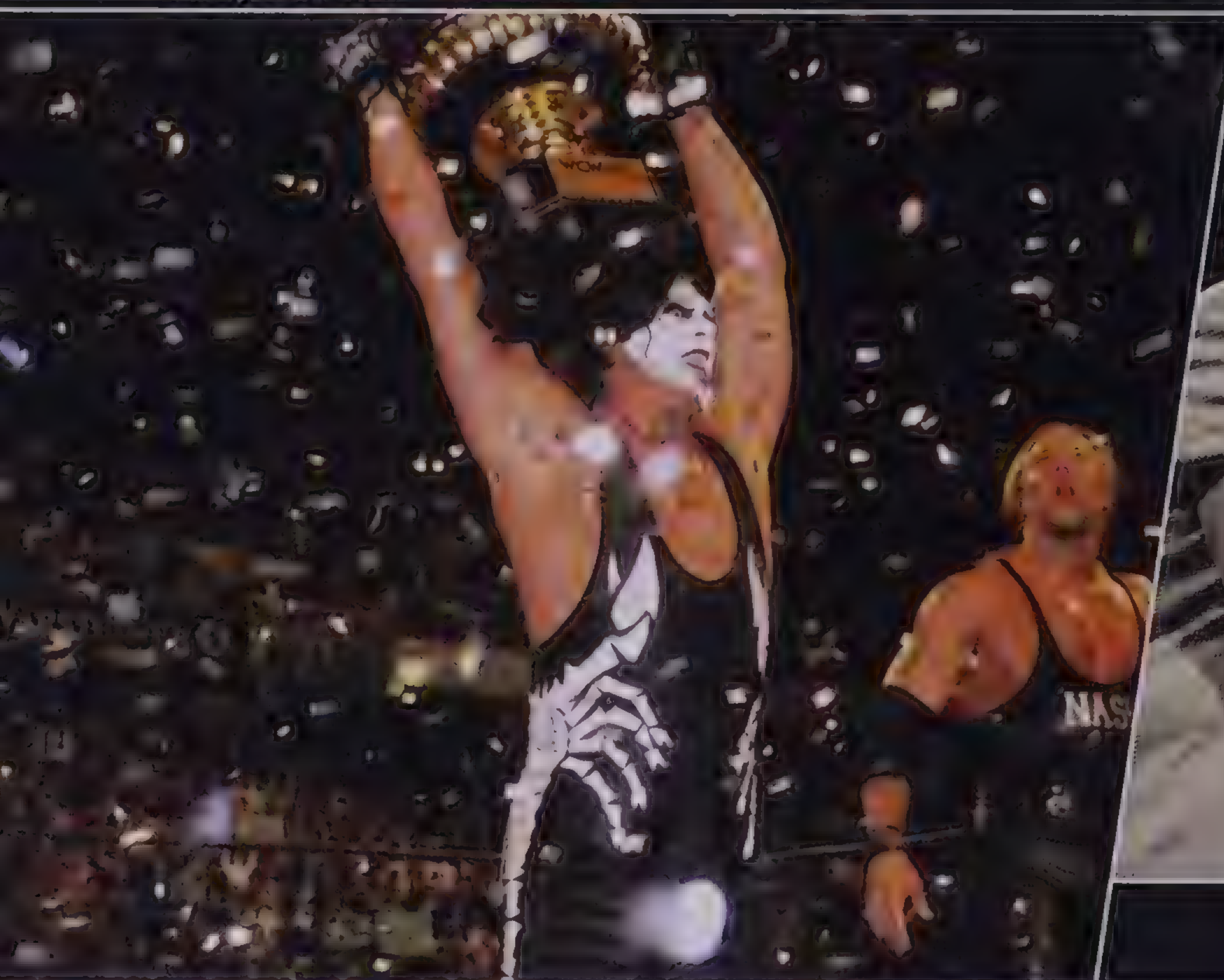
MONDAY NIGHT WAR:

THE END

On April 6, 1998, *Monday Nitro* featured four title matches, en route to yet another victory over *Raw* in the Monday night ratings battle. On the surface, the win may have seemed like a reason to celebrate for WCW, but many within the company knew that the future was not as bright as it seemed.

"I saw Vince McMahon slowly building his own stars, not panicking," says former WCW Superstar Arn Anderson. "Vince was rebuilding his company, and getting a lot of interest. Rock and Austin were starting to come alive. You also had Undertaker, Triple H, and all those guys. It was all coming together and it was the perfect storm, you could just see it."

Sling defeats Kevin Nash for the WCW World Heavyweight Title on April 6, 1998



Stone Cold takes on Vince McMahon with one hand tied behind his back on April 13, 1998

As many within WCW suspected, their luck eventually ran out with the April 6, 1998 episode of *Nitro*. The next week, *Raw* finally topped *Nitro* by a rating of 4.6 to 4.2. To many, the win was a mere formality. The emergence of Stone Cold Steve Austin, D-Generation X, The Rock, and the rest of WWE's Attitude Era Superstars had already been providing a more entertaining product for months. The April 13, 1998, rating was just further proof that *Raw* was the superior show.

D-Generation X



Meanwhile, while WWE was beginning its surge, years of mismanagement were beginning to rear their ugly head in WCW. Among the flaws was WCW's failure to create a quality licensing and royalty program. Superstars who jumped from WWE during the Monday Night War were accustomed to receiving sizable paychecks from merchandise sales. With those paychecks came itemized sheets detailing what was sold and how much of the revenue went to the Superstar. Despite telling incoming Superstars that they would receive similar paychecks, WCW was never able to fully mirror WWE's royalty system. As a result, to make up for broken merchandising promises, WCW was forced to increase the compensation on many of its already sizable Superstar contracts.

"Another mistake Eric Bischoff made was going to the bar with the guys after shows," recalls former WCW executive J.J. Dillon. "They would wait until he got a few in him, then get him to promise they could fly first class or that the company would pay for their rental cars. So the cost of operations would constantly be escalating. It was sad to watch."

It wasn't long before talent costs alone were reportedly greater than 60 percent of the revenue that was being made. Add production costs, marketing materials, arena rental fees, and employee salaries to the equation and WCW was beginning to hit hard times behind the scenes.

66 *He did it out of naivety; he was having a great time. He thought he made the grade wheeling and dealing, then all of the sudden he went, 'Oh, I messed up.'*



—Larry Zbyszko on Eric Bischoff

Things weren't much better in front of the camera. The nWo had already splintered off into several different watered-down versions, while the rest of *Nitro* featured listless or oftentimes convoluted storylines.



68 *When you acquire something, if you don't understand the basics, then it's not a good business model. Ted never really understood the basics, never understood psychology. He just thought, 'Alright, you go buy stars and put them in their underwear and put them in the ring.'*

—Vince McMahon



"Their creative sucked," recalls Vince Russo. "I don't want to discredit anybody, but they kind of fell into that nWo thing, they really did. I mean you had two top stars from WWE jump ship and go to their organization, then for the first time, Hulk Hogan turns heel after 25 years. They fell into something. If you look at the rest of the show creatively, there was nothing. Zero."

GOLDBERG

Heading into the Summer of 1998, *Raw* had firmly repositioned itself as the leader of the ratings war, thanks in large part to the ongoing drama between Steve Austin and Mr. McMahon. The one shining light WCW had to combat WWE's success was its emerging megastar, Goldberg.

Since debuting in late 1997, Goldberg had amassed an impressive winning streak that quickly caught the fans' imagination, and for a period of time, he was arguably hotter than anybody in sports-entertainment history. To capitalize on Goldberg's popularity, Bischoff hastily booked him to challenge Hulk Hogan for the WCW Championship on the July 6, 1998, episode of *Nitro*.

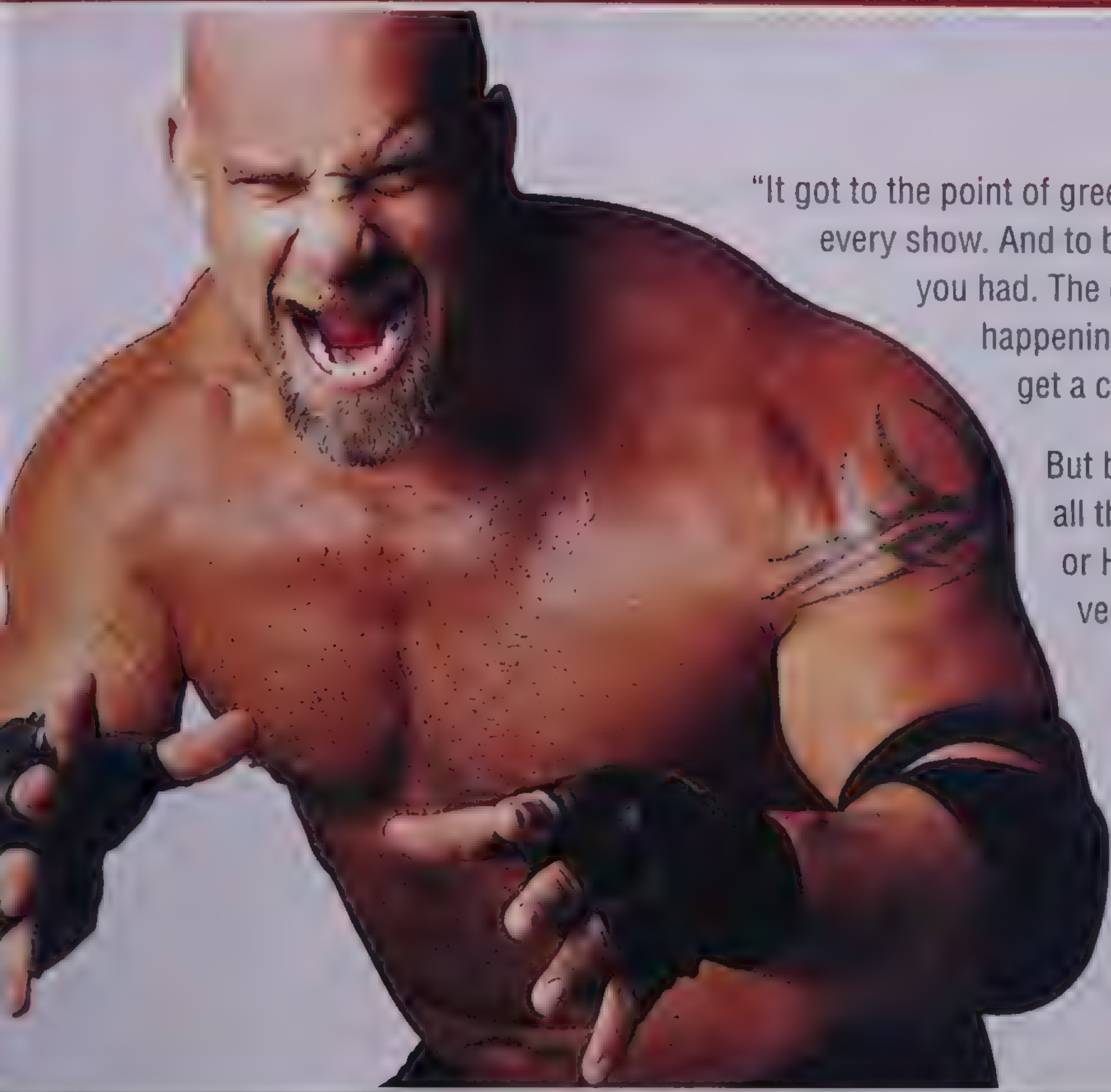


J.J. Dillon came to me and told me that Eric wanted to give Goldberg versus Hogan away the next Monday night because they were in Atlanta. It was a political decision made because the corporate people were coming to the matches.



—Kevin Sullivan

The decision to give Goldberg versus Hogan away on free television with very little promotion was widely panned by industry insiders. For much of the past year, Goldberg had been building toward a championship opportunity, and to many, the ideal location would've been pay-per-view with plenty of lead time to promote. Instead, Bischoff announced the match on a Thursday and gave it away the following Monday. In the short term, the match proved to be a success; *Nitro* beat *Raw* for the first time in 10 weeks. In the long run, however, it simply magnified a seemingly already existing issue that Bischoff would mortgage the future to win in the present.



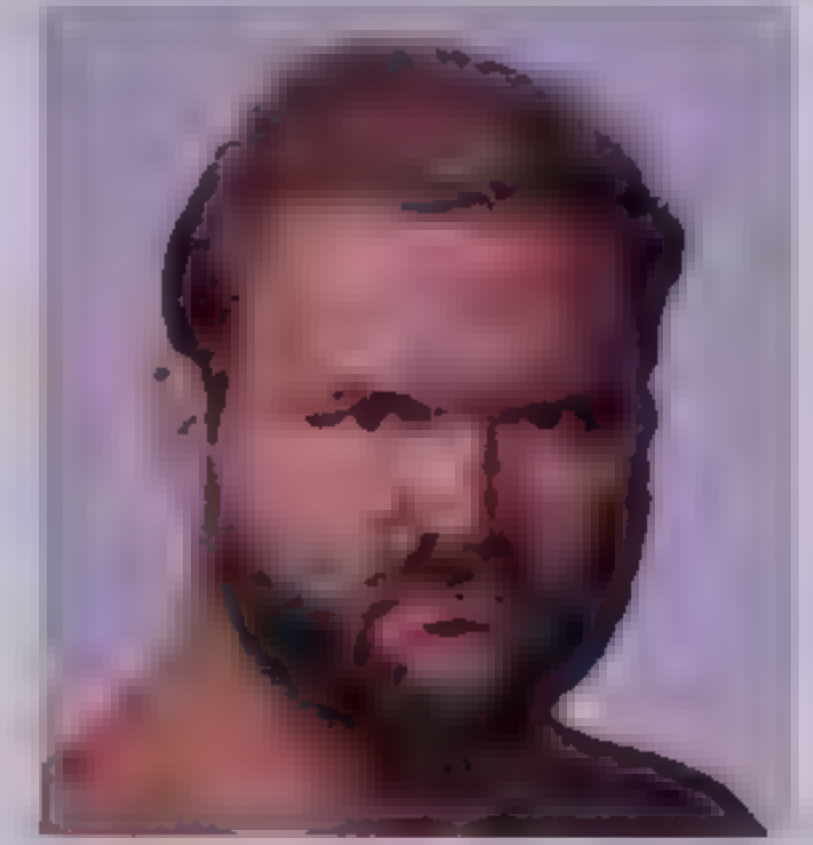
Goldberg

"It got to the point of greed," says Arn Anderson. "We had to win every quarter hour, every segment of every show. And to be able to do that, you had to burn out every bit of talent and every matchup you had. The guys that were smart enough and knew the business and saw what was happening would try to slow it down, would try to talk to Eric and say, 'Hey, let's try to get a couple weeks out of this.'"

But by this time, *Nitro* had already established a history of hotshot booking, dating all the way back to the show's earliest days, which saw Hogan versus Lex Luger or Hogan versus Sting happen regularly with little-to-no promotion. The Hogan-versus-Goldberg match proved to be no different.

56 When you get Sting and Hogan with a one-week promotion for the first time they ever wrestled, now tell me, who's the dumbass that put that on the air?

—Arn Anderson



"THAT'S GONNA PUT SOME BUTTS IN THE SEATS"

By the time the calendar turned to 1999, WCW was already more than two months removed from the final ratings victory it would ever earn. So in an act of desperation, WCW announcer Tony Schiavone was directed to reveal that Mankind would win the WWE Championship on the previously recorded *Raw* that was airing opposite of *Nitro*. Sarcastically he laughed, "That's gonna put some butts in the seats." Ironically, hundreds of thousands of viewers instantly abandoned *Nitro* to watch history unfold on *Raw*. In the end, WWE won the night by .7 ratings points.

That same night, *Nitro* touted "the biggest rematch in professional wrestling history," which was scheduled to see Kevin Nash defend his WCW Title against Goldberg. But after Goldberg was arrested during the show, the match changed to Nash versus Hogan.

Tony Schiavone





Pin after infamous Fingertake of Doom

The contest only lasted a few minutes and simply consisted of Hogan poking Nash in the chest with his index finger. Nash then dropped to the mat, allowing Hogan to pin him for the title. Many historians point to this match, which is now known as the Fingertake of Doom, as the unofficial beginning of the end for *Nitro*.

"The only thing that was doomed by the Fingertake of Doom was the future of WCW. They threw away their World Heavyweight Championship, they made it mean nothing, they treated it like a joke," says Paul Heyman. "The greatest draw for WWE in that one month period was not Stone Cold Steve Austin, or Mr. McMahon, or The Rock, or Triple H. The greatest draw for WWE in that time period was WCW fans pissed off at WCW for being ripped off and they were looking for something else and they found it because WCW drove them away. They gave them a lift to the competitor's parking lot."

OWEN HART, 1965-1999

On May 23, 1999, Owen Hart accidentally fell to his death while being lowered to the ring from the rafters of Kemper Arena in Kansas City, Missouri. The tragic event occurred just moments before Hart, who was performing as The Blue Blazer, was scheduled to compete in an Intercontinental Championship Match at the *Over the Edge* pay-per-view.

The following night, *Raw* took a respite from the Monday Night War, as WWE and its Superstars paid respects to their fallen friend. Mick Foley, Debra, Gerald Brisco, and many others all provided emotional remembrances.

"It was really hard for those who knew him and loved him to really get to have the spirit to go on, but they knew that's what Owen would have wanted them to do," remembers Linda McMahon.



BISCHOFF OUT, RUSSO IN

Vince Russo



With both ratings and revenue on the decline, Eric Bischoff was ultimately relieved of his duties in September 1999. In his place, WCW accountant Bill Busch was tapped to run the business side of the company. One of his first orders of business was hiring a new head of creative.

"I remember Bill coming up to me all thrilled, saying, 'Guess what? Good news, we just stole McMahon's writer, Vince Russo,'" recalls Larry Zbyszko. "We stole him; he wasn't even under contract," he said. I had to tell Bill that McMahon didn't have him under contract because he wasn't important."

Vince Russo's value was highly inflated by Vince Russo.

—Vince McMahon



Unfortunately for WCW, the Russo hiring failed to provide any momentum gain for *Nitro*. And rather than increase, ratings continued to tumble, oftentimes drawing less than half of *Raw*'s viewership, leaving many within WCW to wonder exactly how WWE became so successful with Russo so heavily involved in the creative process.

"He drew a lot of his inspiration from *The Jerry Springer Show*," says Stephanie McMahon. "It was fun and entertaining, but the magic was watching Vince McMahon take Vince Russo's creative and really mold it into something that we could actually use. I would say that Vince Russo definitely had an impact because he was able to bring a lot of those soap opera elements, but without Vince McMahon, they would have never been successful."

Without McMahon by his side, Russo and his extravagant ideas floundered, which forced WCW to remove him from his post just months after he accepted the position.

There were a lot of people in the business at the time who thought I somehow planted Vince Russo into that locker room. He was that bad.



—Vince McMahon



"I will be the first one to admit that it was a failure," says Russo. "I have no problem admitting that. I also know I need to be in a position where I can succeed."

REBOOT

Mere months after sending Russo home, WCW bizarrely placed him back into a position of creative power in early 2000. To further confound matters, he was teamed with Bischoff, another person WCW had sent home the year prior.

While WCW was busy continually replacing leadership positions, *Raw* was regularly scoring well above six in the ratings. In addition to Steve Austin, The Rock, and Triple H continuing to pull in viewers, *Raw* also benefited from an injection of fresh new faces, many of which jumped from WCW, including Chris Jericho and Eddie Guerrero. On the flip side, Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair, and many other faces WCW fans had grown tired of watching were *still* highlighting *Nitro*. To combat their increasingly stale product, Russo and Bischoff elected to reboot WCW completely, starting April 10, 2000.

Hitting the reset button, which consisted of vacating all championships and placing more of a perceived emphasis on younger competitors, failed to interest viewers. And *Nitro* ratings continued to be dwarfed by *Raw*.

I didn't know Eric at the time. You can't force two guys to work together creatively who don't even know each other. That's exactly what they did.

—Vince Russo



THE END



For all its issues both behind and in front of the camera, many believe the true final nail in WCW's coffin came when the AOL and Time Warner merger was completed in January 2001.

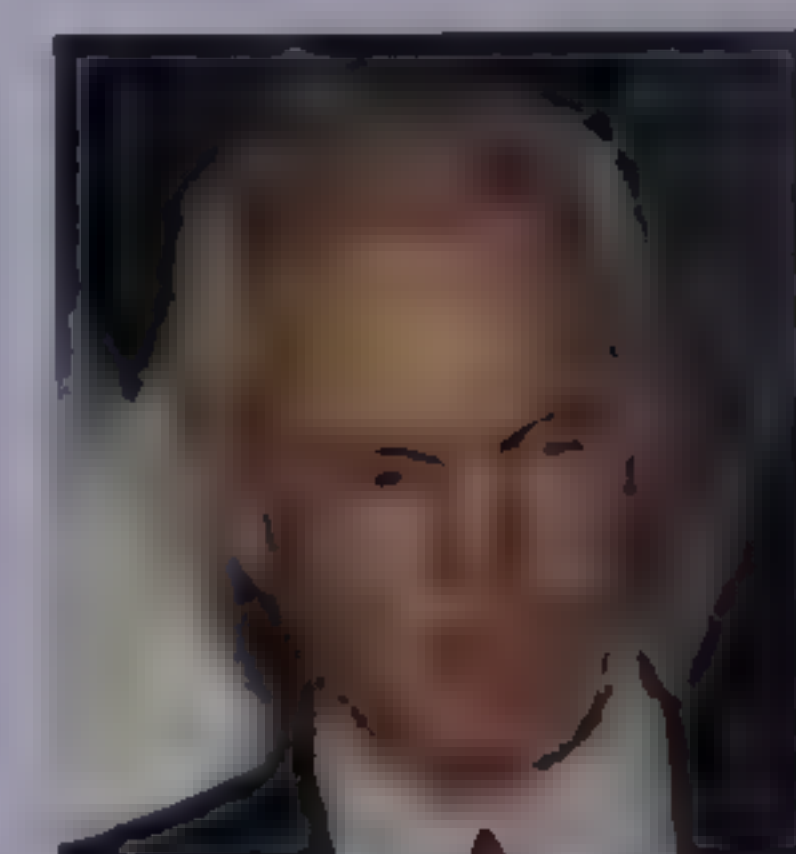
Following the merger, Ted Turner had relinquished considerable control over WCW and the networks on which it aired. And with an estimated loss of \$80 million, as reported by CNN, in 2000 alone, TBS, Inc. CEO Jamie Kellner ultimately decided to pull the plug on WCW in early 2001⁽³⁾.

"When AOL came in, they wanted nothing to do with the wrestling business," claims Russo. "It was a decision made at such a high management level, and had nothing to do with what Hulk Hogan got paid. It had nothing to do with anything wrestling wise; they didn't want to be in the wrestling business and everybody knew it."

(3) WWF Buys Rival WCW. (2001, March 23). *Money.CNN.Com*.

My sense always was that some of the network's presidents would be happy to see WCW go away, that they could fill it up with other things.

—Dr. Harvey Schiller,
former Turner Sports president



Initially, WCW was to be sold to Bischoff and his group of investors, Fusient Media Ventures. But when AOL Time Warner refused to include television rights in the deal, the sale disintegrated. That's when WWE swooped in and acquired WCW for a miniscule amount, marking the end of the nearly 20-year McMahon-Turner rivalry.

"I would have preferred to have not gone through the Monday Night Wars," says Vince McMahon. "I know the old adage, 'What doesn't kill you makes you stronger,' and generally speaking, I would agree with that. But there were some rotten times when you are David competing with Goliath. You have to think differently. You need to think of guerrilla tactics; you need to find a way to compete with people and you don't have to compete with them the way they want you to compete. If you're fighting with a giant, you have to be careful; you can't go toe to toe or you will get knocked down. And there were times when we got knocked down and almost out."

When I heard what [Vince McMahon] had bought it for, I said, 'I wish I would've known,' because I would've tried to buy it. For the money that he bought it for, I could've afforded it.



—Chris Jericho

THE FINAL NITRO

With the WCW sale completed, all the pieces were in place for one of the most historic nights in sports-entertainment history: The *Raw-Nitro* simulcast.

When *Raw* went on the air on March 26, 2001, the Mr. McMahon character gleefully gloated over the purchase of his rival. He even went so far as to publicly fire WCW's Jeff Jarrett, who left WWE in a reckless manner years earlier. And as the show progressed, Monday Night War viewers were finally able to put their remotes down, as both *Raw* and *Nitro* aired the same content for the first time ever. It was Mr. McMahon addressing the audience from a *Raw* ring, and Shane McMahon doing the same from *Nitro*. For storyline purposes, it was explained that Shane had actually purchased WCW right from under his father's nose, forcing Mr. McMahon to experience a wide range of sentiments over the course of a few short minutes. It wasn't all that different from what Vince McMahon the businessman was battling internally.

"My dad had very mixed emotions about buying WCW," says Stephanie McMahon. "In fact, I remember that day walking around the arena, and Shane had gone to Florida where WCW had their show, and my dad was just very different all day."

"One of the things my dad says all the time, 'The business is the way it is because I made it that way.' So there was no more competition, there was no place for wrestlers to learn their craft on a bigger stage and really form who they were as characters. And I think part of him was very mixed because part of my dad loves to fight. He loves the challenge. To him, that's living life on the edge. He wants to fight against everything, fight against his own family a lot, too. And I think when he bought WCW, maybe he won that one big battle, that one big war, but part of him really misses that competition. Competition is good for business and I think part of him not only misses the competition, but just misses the fight."

I like to kid Shane that he bought a lemon.



—Vince McMahon



THE INVASION

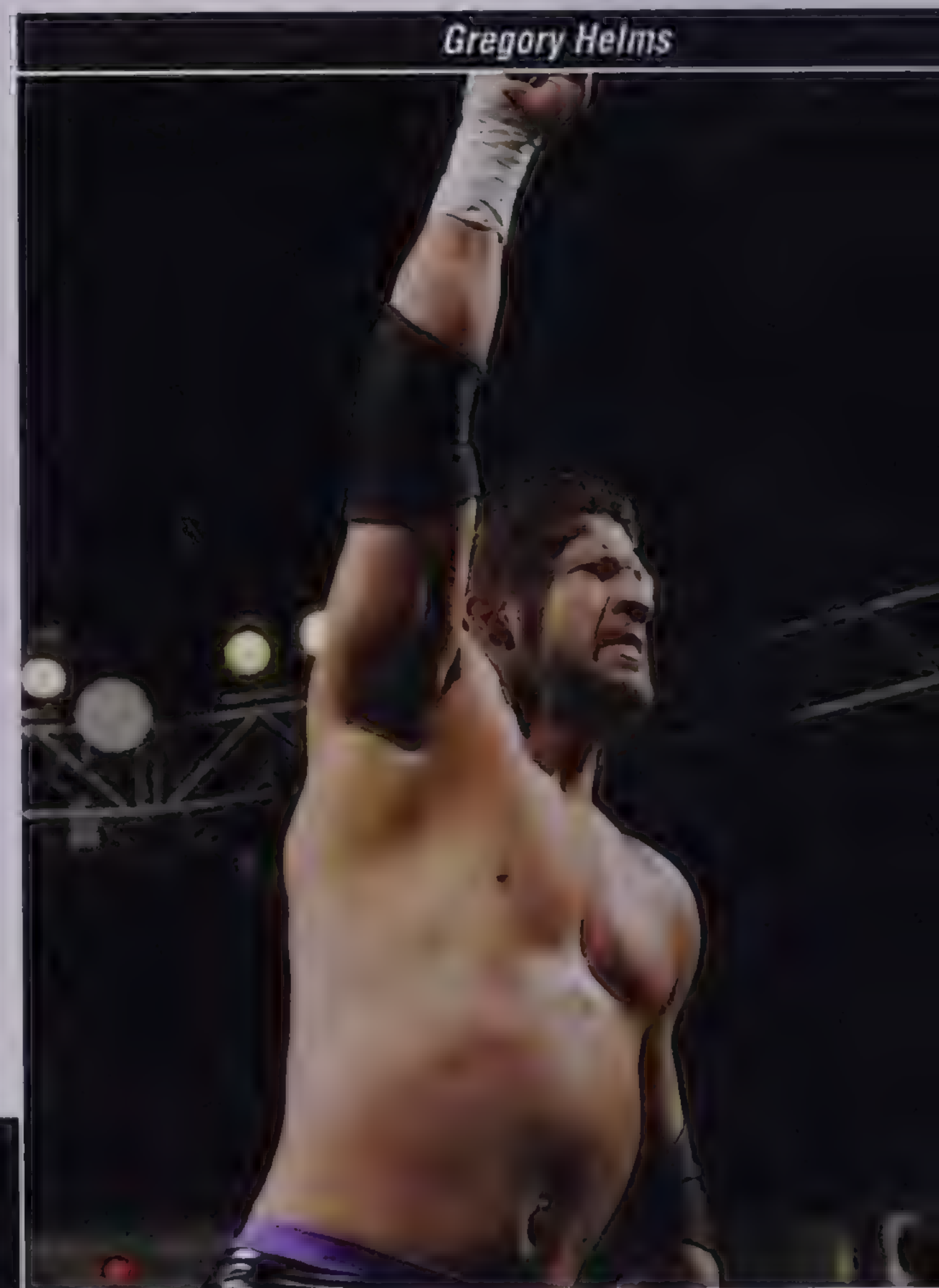
THE END OF NITRO



As the final *Nitro* neared its conclusion, a range of emotions swept over the WCW talent. Many never expected WCW to sell, particularly to WWE, resulting in an eerie sense of bewilderment circling throughout

the locker room area. Some worried they'd never work again following the final *Nitro*, while others saw WWE coming in as an opportunity.

"There was a lot of fear for a lot of guys; uncertainty is an understatement if there ever was one," recalls former WCW Superstar Gregory Helms. "Most of us didn't know if there was going to be another match, another *Nitro*, another WCW. As far as we were concerned, that last night in Panama was going to be, for some of us, our last match in a big company. Even if WWE bought all the contracts, every single one, you can't have that many guys on TV. There's only so many spots available."



Gregory Helms



Stacey Keibler



Booker T

"I was the U.S. Champ and the Heavyweight Champ at the time," says Booker T. "I was closing the company down and I was going to be victorious in the final night of WCW's existence. So for me, it was a win. It was a great night for me. It was perhaps one of the greatest nights in my storied career, to come from the bottom of a company and on the final night to walk out as the United States Champion and the Heavyweight Champion. Then I got to go on and test myself with some of the greatest combatants in WWE. That was a venture I was really looking forward to."

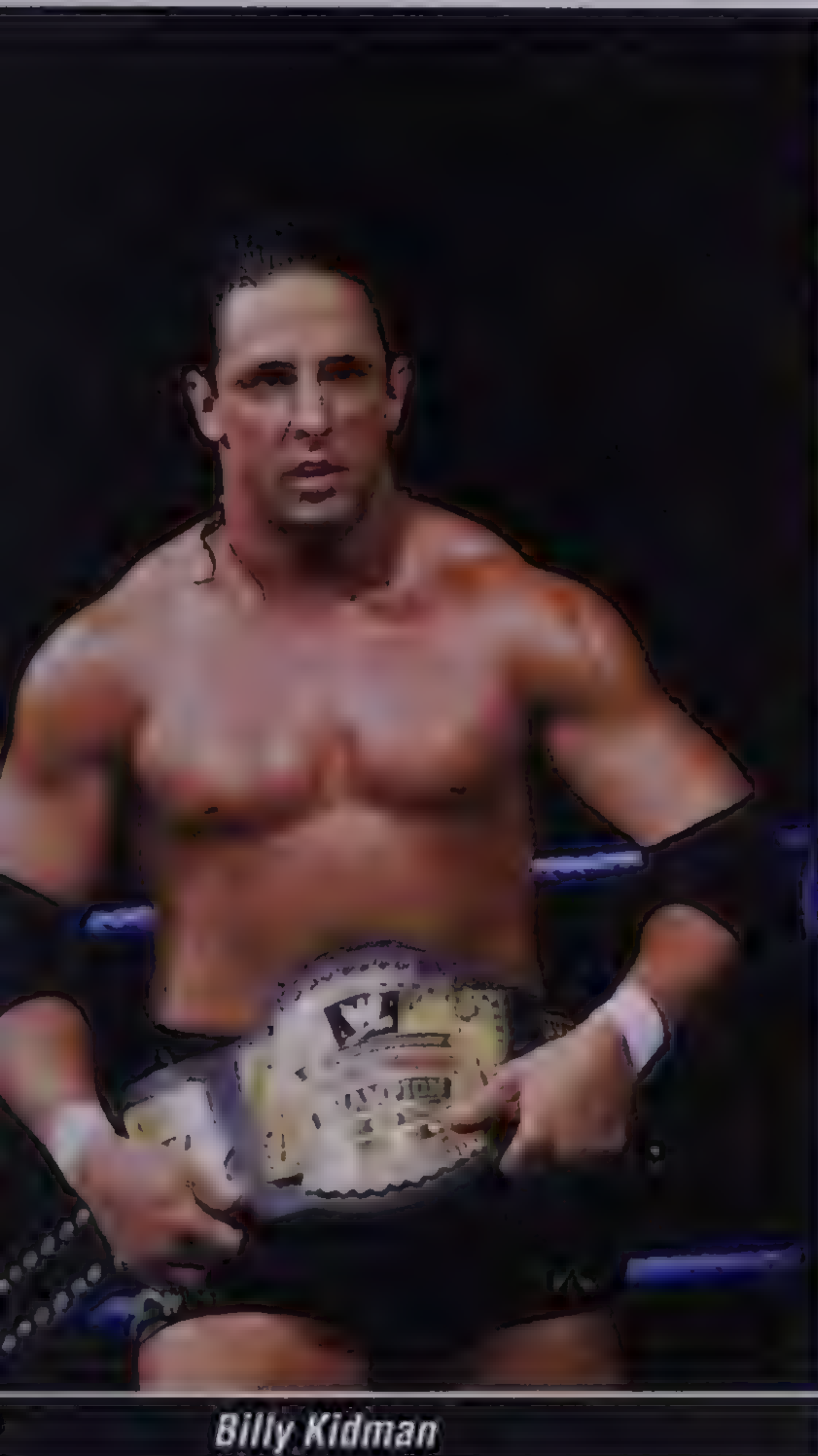
When the smoke finally cleared from the final *Nitro*, WWE worked with WCW executives to assess which assets from the sale were most valuable.

“Some representatives from WWE came down and spoke with everyone in WCW about how the transition process was going to happen,” remembers John Laurinaitis. “I spoke to Jim Ross, who was the head of Talent Relations for WWE, and he wanted to get my point of view on what talent we should consider keeping.”

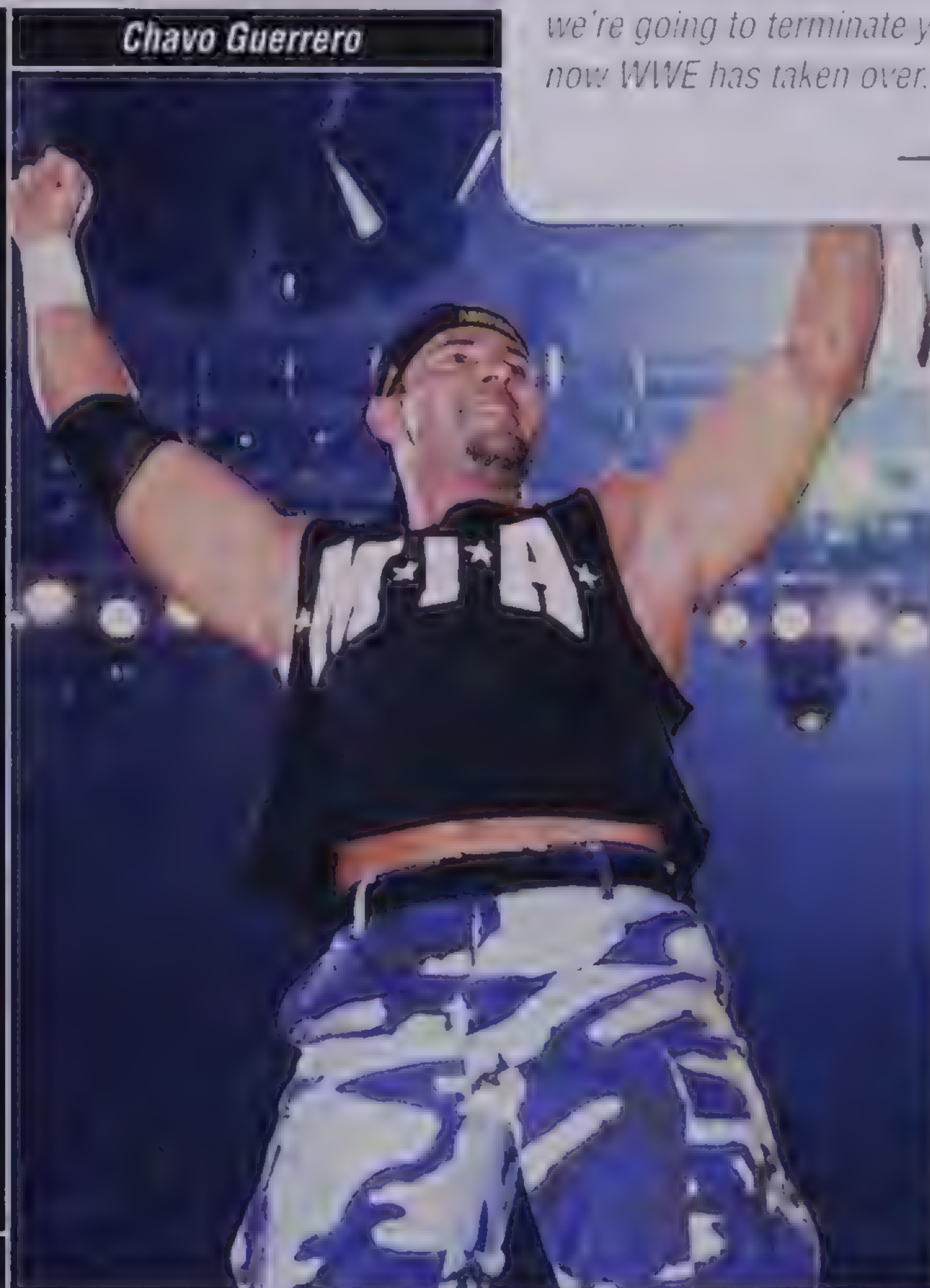
In the end, WWE assumed only two dozen contracts, most of which belonged to Superstars such as Chavo Guerrero, Billy Kidman, and Lance Storm. The larger contracts were guaranteed and typically paid the Superstars far more than they were worth.

“It was a stressful time. I thought that I would’ve been one of the guys that would’ve been picked up. But in my 23 years of performing all over the world, I’ve never wrestled one match for WWE. I remember when John Laurinaitis called me, saying, ‘Norman, we’re going to terminate your contract because now WWE has taken over.’”

— Norman Smiley



Billy Kidman



Chavo Guerrero



Lance Storm

WWE chose not to pick up the deals for Sting, Goldberg, Lex Luger, and other top names. The price tags were simply too high for Superstars who had already proven they weren’t attracting audiences in WCW.

Responsibility for the guaranteed contracts that weren’t purchased by WWE went to AOL Time Warner. This allowed a large number of top-tier talent to simply sit home and receive 100 percent of their salary for doing absolutely nothing. AOL Time Warner attempted to buy out many of the deals, reportedly offering the Superstars less than \$0.50 on the dollar, according to the *NY Daily News*⁽⁴⁾. Most declined the offer, choosing to collect their salaries in their entirety. One Superstar who eventually took the offer was Diamond Dallas Page.

“It was the stupidest thing I ever did. I left \$487,000 on the table,” admits DDP. “I was 45. If I was 41, I wouldn’t have done that. Looking back on it, I should have taken the money.”

(4) Scherer, D. (2001, April 21). ‘New’ WCW Gets Ready to Climb Off the Mat. *NY Daily News*

Upon purchasing WCW, WWE anticipated re-launching the promotion as a standalone brand on TNN as early as June 9, 2001. After further consideration, however, producing a show with only a fraction of a roster that was largely responsible for losing approximately \$80 million the year before did not seem sensible. So WWE began integrating its new WCW talent into its existing *Raw* and *SmackDown* shows.

“All of a sudden you have a whole new roster of characters,” says Stephanie McMahon, Executive Vice President, Creative. “It’s exciting to write for a whole new roster of characters. It freshened everything up, or so we thought.”

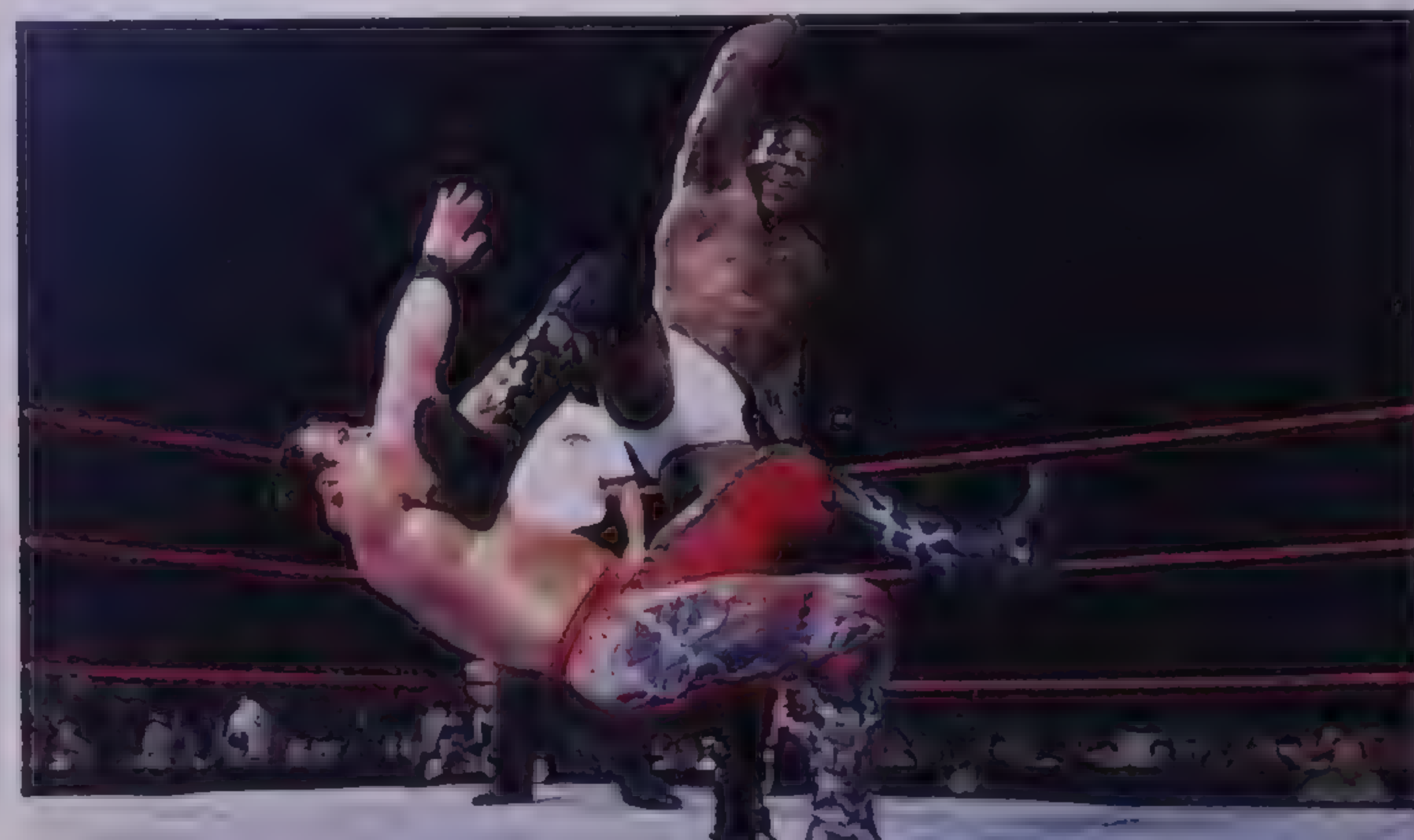
FACT:

Timeslots on TNT and TBS were not included in the sale of WCW to WWE.

Unfortunately, WCW's debut match on WWE programming did not go well. On July 2, *Raw* transformed a portion of the program into a WCW-only show, complete with WCW announcers, logos, and ring skirts. This match between Buff Bagwell and Booker T resulted in one of the most poorly received matches in sports-entertainment history.

"It was not good," recalls Stephanie McMahon. "We were in Tacoma, which is a giant facility, and the match did not resonate with the crowd. Silence is deafening no matter where you are, but the silence echoed off the walls and was even louder in that large venue.

"We didn't judge WCW's success off one match," continued McMahon. "But given that one match, our eyeballs suddenly went wide. It was a very eye-opening experience."



It was an absolute debacle. I remember watching it thinking this is just terrible.

— JBL

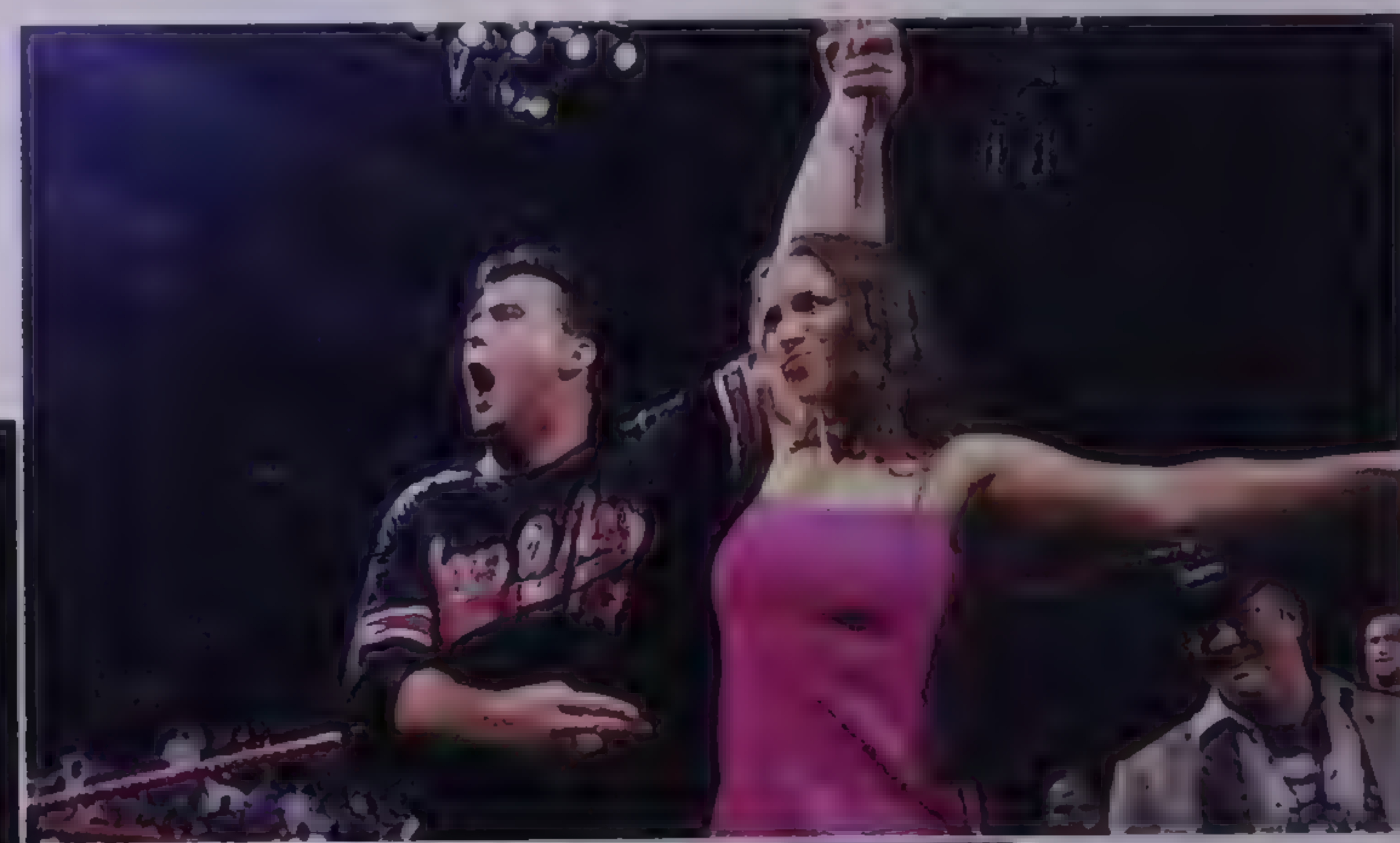


People [expletive] all over it. It was blamed on Bagwell; I think the blame was put in the right place on that, obviously. Booker T's in the Hall of Fame.

— X-Pac



Coincidentally, the integration of the WCW brand into WWE programming took an unexpected turn the following week when ECW was added to the mix. The storyline stated that Stephanie McMahon had purchased the extreme promotion and joined forces with her brother, Shane, and his WCW brand to form The Alliance. Their goal was to put their father, Vince McMahon, and all of WWE out of business.



NAME OPTIONS:

Prior to *The Alliance* being selected as the name for the WCW/ECW faction, the following names were considered during a brainstorming session:

» The Order

» The New Breed

» Exodus

» Union Force

» The Stand

» Modern Uprising

» Reformation

The two sides eventually squared off at the *Invasion* pay-per-view on July 22. In the main event, The Alliance's Diamond Dallas Page, Booker T, Rhyno, and The Dudley Boyz defeated WWE's Stone Cold Steve Austin, Kurt Angle, Undertaker, Kane, and Chris Jericho after Stone Cold turned his back on WWE to join The Alliance. Austin's defection helped add the credibility and star power The Alliance lacked, thanks to many WCW top names not coming over following the sale.

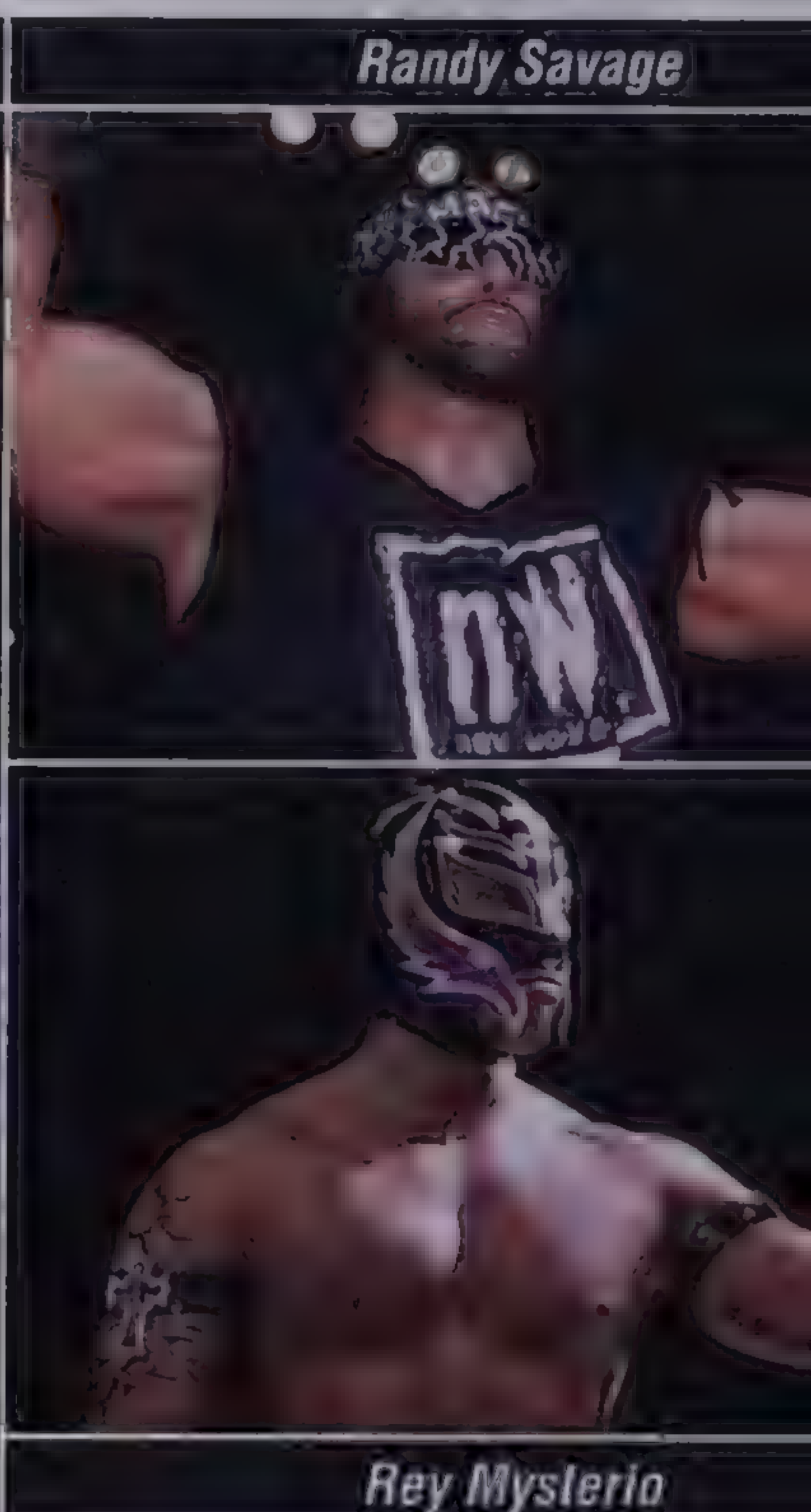




The rivalry between WWE and The Alliance continued through the summer, with additional WWE star power being added to the WCW/ECW mix along the way. The WWE names to jump to The Alliance included Christian, William Regal, and Kurt Angle. And while the infusion of established WWE Superstars certainly helped lend credibility to The Alliance, many still felt a tangible void.

NOTABLE WCW SUPERSTARS THAT DID NOT COME OVER IN THE SALE:

- | | | | |
|--------------|-------------|-----------------|----------------|
| › Hulk Hogan | › Goldberg | › Rey Mysterio | › Randy Savage |
| › Kevin Nash | › Bret Hart | › Scott Steiner | › Lex Luger |
| › Scott Hall | › Ric Flair | › Sting | |



“The impact was lessened because you had certain top talent who had guaranteed contracts with Time Warner and didn’t have to work,” says Laurinaitis. “We were doing an invasion and we didn’t have the top guys who were on TV every week for WCW. The money draws are your top talent, but The Invasion seemed like mostly upper-to-lower mid-card guys, with a few exceptions.”

Despite lacking Sting, Goldberg, Hogan, and WCW’s other top stars, The Invasion managed to maintain viewer interest as the storyline neared Thanksgiving. With interest piqued, *Survivor Series* proved to be the ideal location for The Invasion saga to reach its culmination. By night’s end, WWE and WCW titles would be unified and only one promotion would be left standing.

RAW RATINGS BEFORE AND AFTER THE ALLIANCE FORMED

Average rating February 19 – July 2: 4.7

Average rating July 9 – November 18: 4.7

For many, though, *Survivor Series* was a mere formality, as WWE had already won the Monday Night War, and later, perhaps subconsciously, further proved its dominance when its own Superstars were injected into The Alliance, as evidenced by the five-man team representing WCW/ECW in the main event (Austin, Angle, Booker T, Rob Van Dam, and Shane McMahon). Three of the five Alliance representatives were more WWE than anything else. The same held true almost all the way down the card.

“It wasn’t truly promotion versus promotion,” recalls Edge, who defeated Test at *Survivor Series* to unify the Intercontinental and United States Championships. “I was happy to be the one to unify them, but at the same time, it was two WWE guys fighting over it.”



The final nail in The Alliance’s coffin came in the night’s main event when Angle revealed his true WWE colors, turning his back on WCW/ECW to help Mr. McMahon vanquish his rivals once and for all. Truthfully, WWE had already won the war months prior. But *Survivor Series* did serve as the symbolic moment in history when WWE eradicated the last true threat to its sports-entertainment empire.



BRAND EXTENSION

CREATING A NEW PARADIGM

The conclusion of the Invasion storyline presented a peculiar position for WWE. For the first time ever, the sports-entertainment empire existed without the presence of outside competition, perceived or legitimate. At the same time, the acquisition of WCW, coupled with WWE's ongoing talent development, gave the company a surplus of quality Superstars. Additionally, the advent of *SmackDown* was contributing to storylines being played out at an increasingly rapid pace.

On the surface, having no competition, an excess of talented Superstars, and a successful primetime show on network television weren't necessarily the worst problems to have. But it wasn't an ideal situation. To help combat these issues, WWE constructed a completely new paradigm that would alter the sports-entertainment landscape in a way never before seen. Called the Brand Extension, the concept split WWE into two separate and distinct brands, *Raw* and *SmackDown*, beginning in March 2002.

BRAND EXTENSION DRAFT, MARCH 25, 2002

The picks were made by Mr. McMahon for *Raw* and Ric Flair for *SmackDown*. The first 10 rounds of the draft took place on *Raw*. The following 20 rounds were revealed on WWE.com.

ROUND	BRAND	SUPERSTAR
1	SmackDown	The Rock
1	Raw	Undertaker
2	SmackDown	Kurt Angle
2	Raw	nWo
3	SmackDown	Chris Benoit
3	Raw	Kane
4	SmackDown	Hulk Hogan
4	Raw	Rob Van Dam
5	SmackDown	Billy & Chuck
5	Raw	Booker T
6	SmackDown	Edge
6	Raw	Big Show
7	SmackDown	Rikishi
7	Raw	Bubba Ray Dudley
8	SmackDown	D-Von Dudley
8	Raw	Brock Lesnar
9	SmackDown	Mark Henry
9	Raw	William Regal
10	SmackDown	Maven
10	Raw	Lita

Prior to the split, Superstars appeared regularly on both *Raw* and *SmackDown*. The Brand Extension eliminated this practice. Instead, each Superstar was drafted to either *Raw* or *SmackDown* and was only permitted to appear on the show to which he was drafted, meaning *SmackDown*'s first pick, The Rock, was no longer allowed on *Raw*, while *Raw*'s initial selection, Undertaker, couldn't cross over to *SmackDown*.

As anticipated, separating the rosters created a natural and legitimate competition between the two brands that extended far beyond what was seen on television each week. In locker room areas, when cameras were nowhere to be found, Superstars regularly requested to see attendance figures for each tour, with the sole hope of being able to say they generated more revenue for WWE than the other brand. Many insiders say the *SmackDown* roster took the competition to a greater level. After allegedly feeling like second-class citizens to the glitz, glamour, and pageantry of *Raw*'s live presentation, *SmackDown*'s Superstars banded together and vowed to produce a show that highlighted what they believed was their superior athleticism. They also demanded a high level of loyalty from everybody associated with their brand; locker room leaders such as JBL and Undertaker wouldn't even allow members of the *SmackDown* crew to wear the color red while on tour.

DID YOU KNOW?:

WWE utilized a draft to shake up the roster nine times from 2002 to 2011, creating several memorable moments where everyone from the WWE Champion to members of the announce teams switched brands.



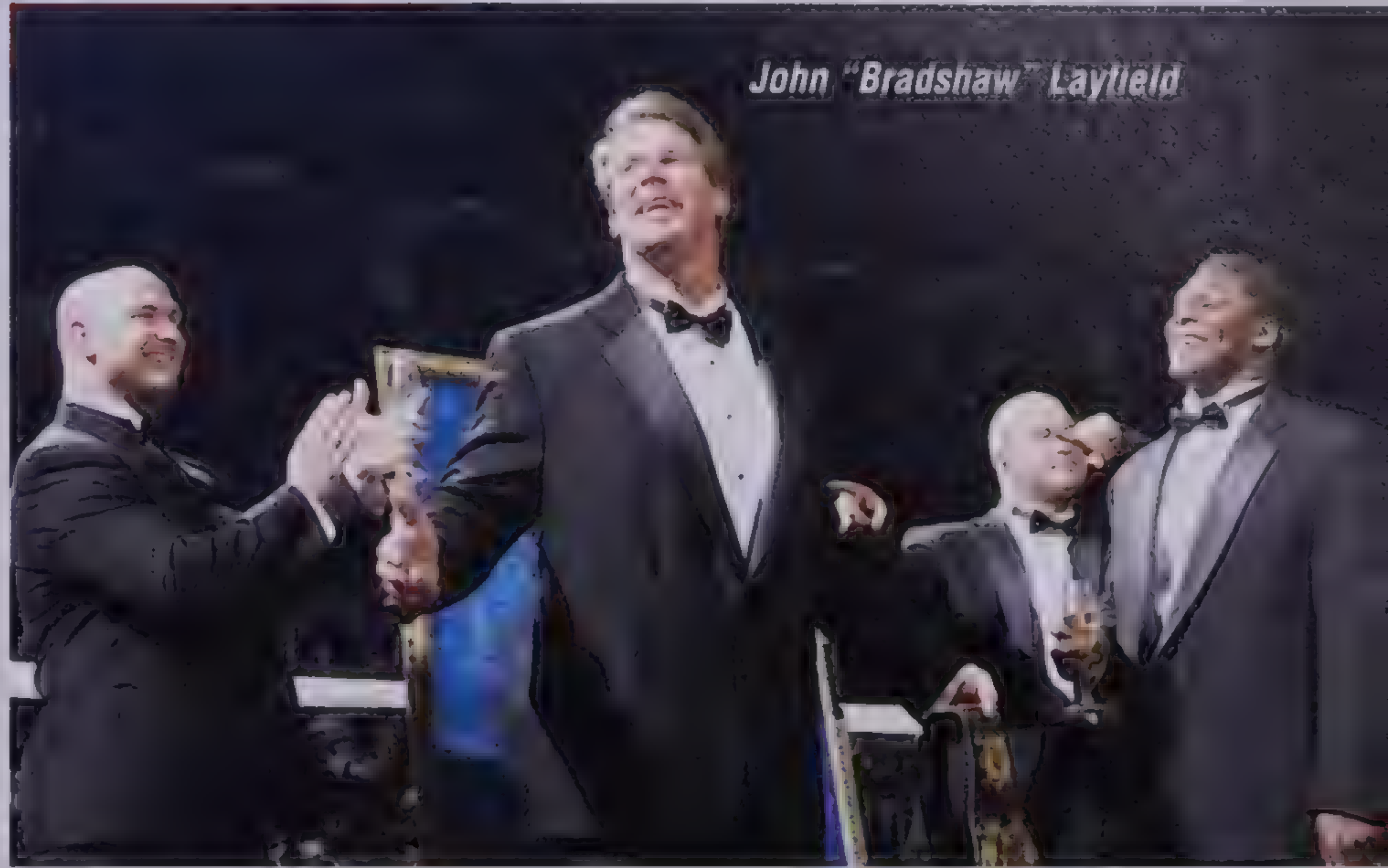
“Competition always makes you drive to be the best you can be and I think there’s definitely that competitive aspect of *SmackDown* versus *Monday Night Raw*,” says Batista. “It brings out the best of both crews. Maybe not on *Raw*, but definitely on *SmackDown* because you know nobody wants to be the ugly stepchild, so it puts a bit of a chip on your shoulder. *SmackDown* is a great show and a lot of times they don’t get the attention they should because *Monday Night Raw* is a live show and it’s always going to be the cornerstone of WWE. But *SmackDown* can hold its own any day; at least it did when I was there.”

“Some of us are still pretty adamant about trying to outdo *Raw*,” claims Big Show. “I still consider myself a *SmackDown* guy. I know that we’re the little dog in the pond, or however you want to say it. *Raw* has the better TV exposure, *Raw* does the better pay-per-view drives, yadda, yadda. You know what? We still put a better show on *SmackDown*, in my opinion. We don’t have all the tooty fruity stuff that *Raw* has, but we still bust our ass on *SmackDown*.”

In addition to creating legitimate competition within WWE, the Brand Extension also accomplished the goal of slowing down the rapid progression of storylines. Prior to the split, a Triple H-versus-Chris Jericho rivalry, for example, might play out on both *Raw* and *SmackDown* over the course of six weeks. By limiting the storyline’s exposure to just one show, its arc could now extend through to 12 weeks.

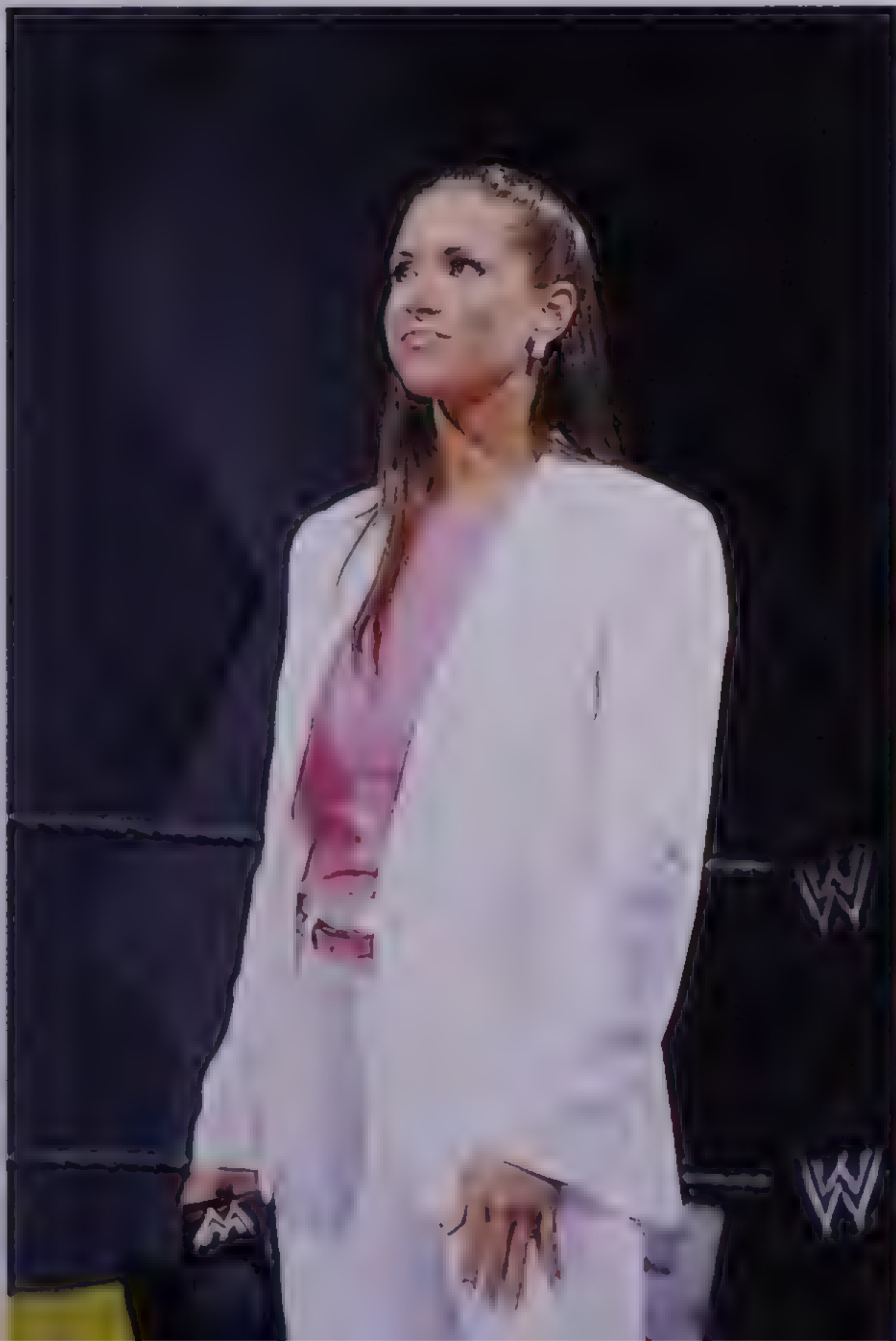
Perhaps more important than storyline pacing, the Brand Extension also opened new windows of high-level opportunity for Superstars that might not have otherwise been elevated.

“The Brand Extension made me a multimillionaire,” says John “Bradshaw” Layfield. “It allowed a lot of people to move to the forefront and become stars. I would never have become WWE Champion if it wasn’t for the Brand Extension. That’s the reason I got to step up in the main event and had that great run with Eddie Guerrero. If it wasn’t for the Brand Extension, we would’ve had plenty of other guys to put in that spot.”



GENERAL MANAGERS

Prior to the Brand Extension, one authority figure, typically Mr. McMahon, made all major decisions for both *Raw* and *SmackDown*. But with each brand now existing in its own ecosystem, and competing against the other, it no longer made sense to have one boss for two shows. So WWE used the Brand Extension as an opportunity to create a new sports-entertainment authority figure: the General Manager.



In July 2002, Stephanie McMahon was named the first-ever *SmackDown* GM. Considering her pedigree, the announcement made plenty of sense. The appointment of the new *Raw* GM, however, will forever go down as one of the most shocking moments in WWE history. Instead of selecting another executive within the company, Vince McMahon welcomed rival Eric Bischoff to WWE as *Raw*’s GM. Equally shocked as the viewing audience were several of the Superstars backstage. To keep Bischoff’s unveiling top secret, he was actually put in a separate hotel from the other talent and was brought in a limousine that was kept in the parking lot. Bischoff didn’t emerge from the limo until moments before he appeared on live television.





At 1,239 days, Bischoff holds the record as longest GM of Raw

“If those roles were reversed and WCW would have put Vince out of business, Eric Bischoff never in a million years would have brought Vince McMahon out as a character on that show, let alone hug him on TV.”

—Triple H



“I remember the feeling backstage when all the Superstars saw Bischoff walking toward the stage,” recalls Stephanie McMahon. “They weren’t expecting it. A lot of them were in absolute shock, as was I a little bit. I knew it was coming, but actually seeing him there was remarkable. Seeing Vince McMahon hug Eric Bischoff, to me it was like in the mafia when you get the double kiss. To me it sealed the deal that Bischoff had lost the war. Bischoff was coming to work for the man that he tried so hard to fight against. To me it was the ultimate victory.”

TWO CHAMPIONS



While the essence of the Brand Extension prevented Superstars from appearing on both shows, there was one exception: the Undisputed WWE Champion was free to appear and defend his title on all WWE programming. In the months following the split, Triple H, Hulk Hogan, Undertaker, and The Rock all held the title at different times and all took advantage of the clause. But after Brock Lesnar defeated The Rock for the gold at *SummerSlam* in August 2002, WWE made the strategic decision to make the new champion exclusive to *SmackDown*, leaving *Raw* without a champion.

“First came the decision that we needed to have two distinct champions,” says Stephanie McMahon. “If you have two distinct brands, if they really are competing brands, then you would need to have two champions. So then the conversation came up: what championship would it be? It’s not the *Raw* championship. What is it? Well historically, the World Title has meant so much and has so much history that we decided to bring that tradition forward and really elevate it as much as possible.”





So on September 2, 2002, Bischoff introduced *Raw* viewers to the World Heavyweight Championship, and crowned Triple H the first-ever WWE Superstar to hold the prestigious title. For The Game, it was an opportunity to continue one of the strongest championship legacies in sports-entertainment history.

ELIMINATION CHAMBER

Bischoff's most noteworthy storyline with WWE came in November 2002, when he introduced the WWE Universe to the Elimination Chamber, a match that combines elements of the *Royal Rumble*, *Survivor Series*, and *WarGames*. During the planning stages, other names considered for the match included:

- » Steel Row » Danger Zone » Panic Room
- » Torture Chamber » The Gauntlet » Hell's Gate

"The history of the championship to me is a huge thing," says Triple H. "If you look back at the lineage, going through WCW back to the NWA, it's a who's who all the way from Lou Thesz forward to Harley Race and Dusty Rhodes and Ric Flair...there's so many of the biggest names ever in this business, and that's the big thing. When you become champion, it puts you on a list, a very short list of the biggest names that's ever been in the business."



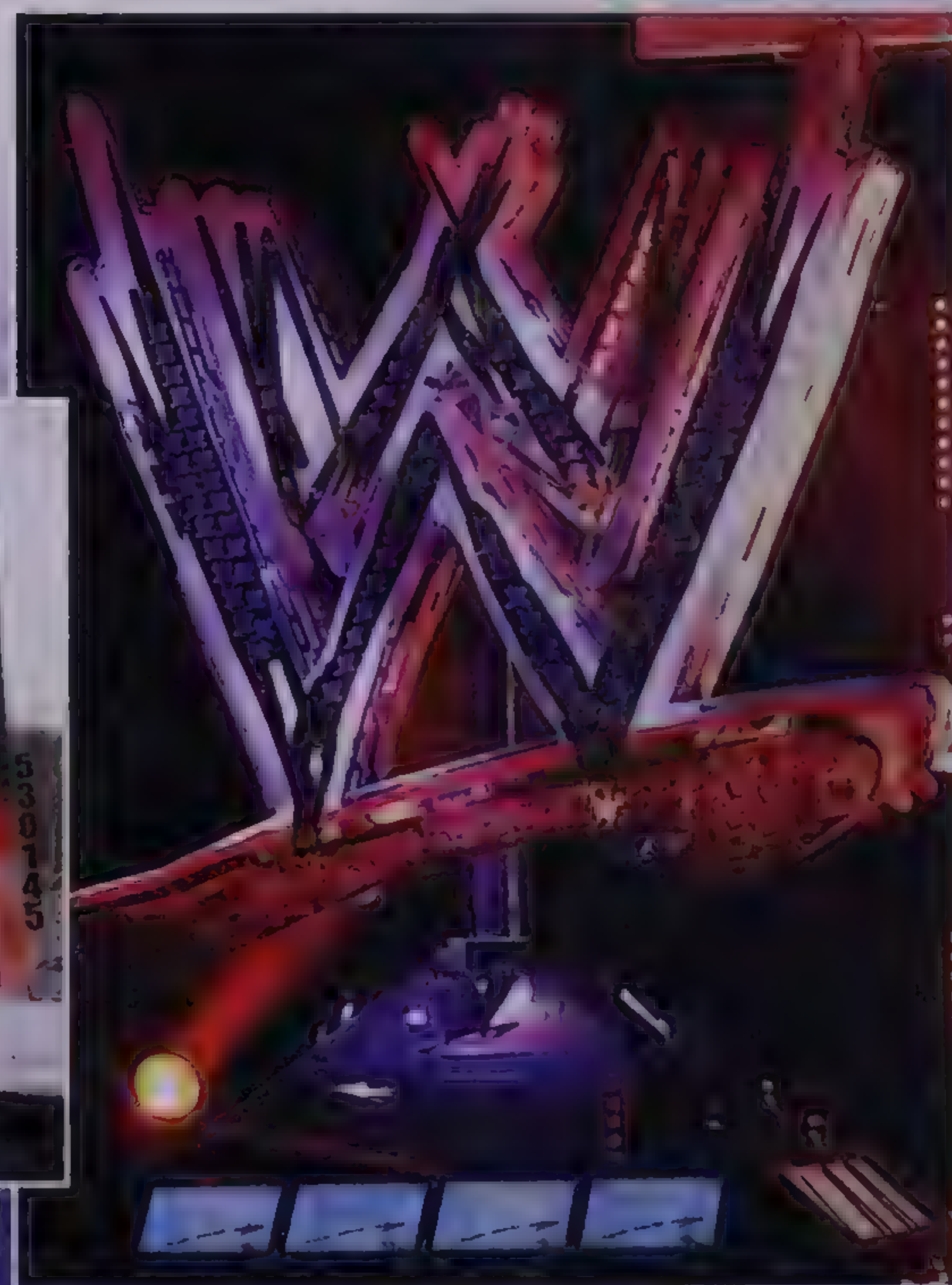
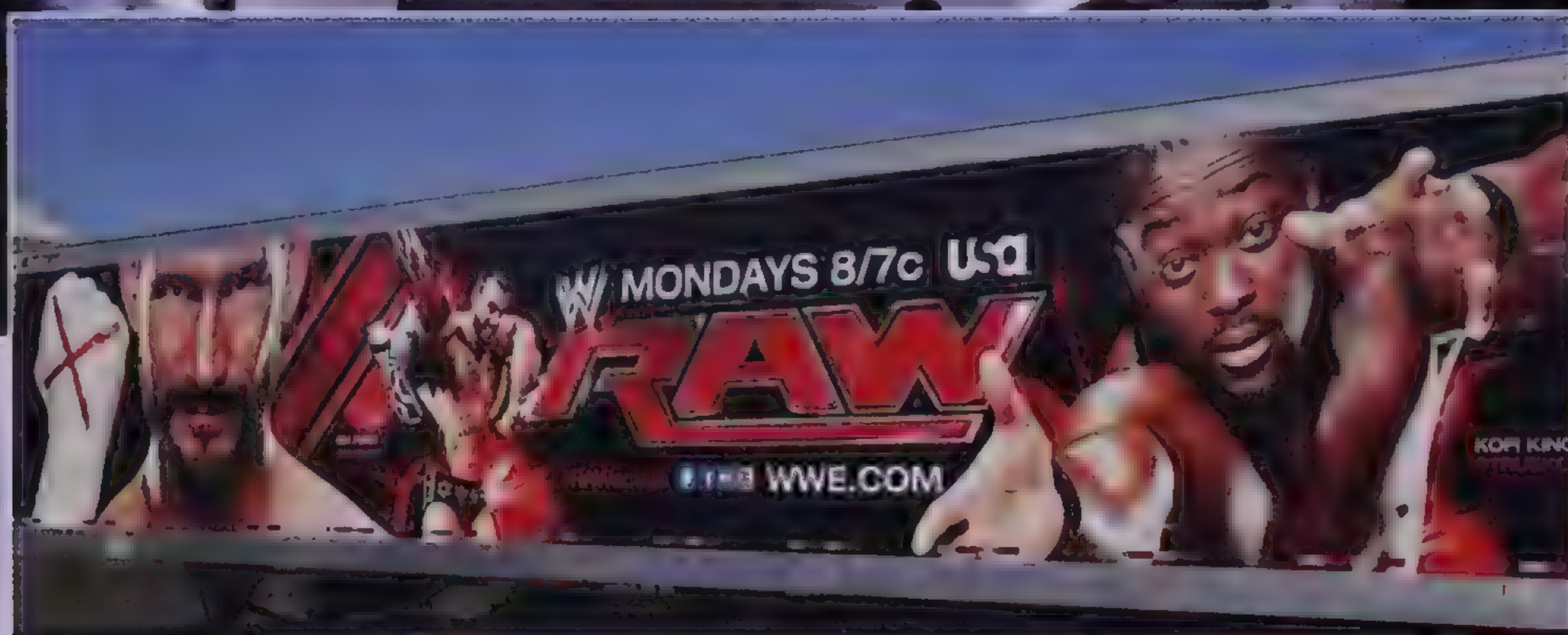
BUSINESS STRATEGY

For the WWE Universe, the Brand Extension created a whole new viewing experience. But what many don't realize is that the impact of the Brand Extension reaches far beyond the on-screen product.

"From a business standpoint, it gave us the opportunity to have two separate brands that could tour at different times," says Stephanie McMahon. "It opened up markets internationally, and it gave us the ability to be away for longer. Before the Brand Extension, all the Superstars were required to be there through the *SmackDown* taping. The Brand Extension gave us the ability to have the *Raw* talent leave earlier and also increase the number of tours that we did. Now we weren't just one roster touring, we were two. We could have two completely separate tours, so from a business standpoint, it made sense."

The number of live events in the United States and Canada alone increased from approximately 200 to 350 annually. And by the end of the Brand Extension's first year, WWE had visited Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Scotland, Germany, England, and Australia—something that wouldn't have been possible with one touring roster.

At this time, the brands went so far as to have separate pay-per-view shows as well. *Backlash*, *Vengeance*, *Unforgiven*, *Taboo Tuesday*, and *New Year's Revolution* were *Raw* branded events, while *SmackDown* offered *Judgment Day*, *The Great American Bash*, *No Mercy*, *Armageddon*, and *No Way Out*. The "Big Four" co-branded events, *Royal Rumble*, *WrestleMania*, *SummerSlam*, and *Survivor Series*, were all the more eagerly anticipated by fans for the chance to see Superstars from both brands go head to head.

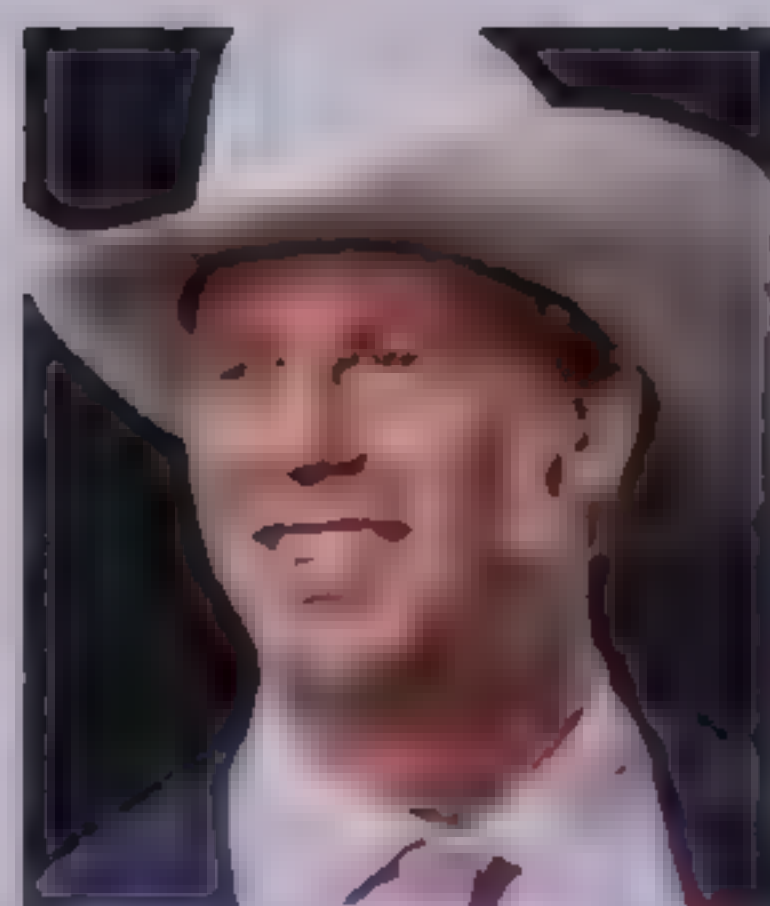




The Brand Extension also impacted WWE's employees working in the corporate headquarters, as many departments were separated into distinct *Raw* and *SmackDown* sub-departments, including the magazine, WWE.com, and the creative writing team. The split helped ensure the authenticity of each brand, while also maintaining a level of competition all the way through the entire infrastructure.

"There was real competition in the writing team," recalls Stephanie McMahon. "When Paul Heyman was the lead writer of *SmackDown*, he had listened in to one of the *Raw* writing team's conference calls. But when he dropped off the line, the conference call company notified us that someone had left the conference. We went down the list of who was supposed to be on the call and we were all still there. So I went and traced the number and sure enough it was Paul Heyman's cell phone. He still vehemently denied that it was him. He came up with this story that someone had stolen his cell phone. I said, 'Paul, so they just happened to know how to dial into the conference call with the private ID code and just happened to be listening?' And he said, 'Well, yes. I can't say for sure, but it's the weirdest thing.'"

The Brand Extension was something that Vince came up with. People disagreed with it for a year or two and the first time around it wasn't working. But Vince stayed with it and it's going to be something that I think is going to be one of the greatest returns in WWE history.



—JBL

WWE HOMECOMING

RETURN TO USA

Today, WWE and USA Network enjoy a far-reaching partnership that is highly valued by both parties. But that wasn't always the case, despite having a relationship that spans decades.

"When WWE first started on USA, it was a little bit tenuous," recalls Linda McMahon. "Even though WWE gave great ratings, the president of USA at the time, Kay Koplovitz, really was not a WWE fan."

WWE entered into its partnership with USA in the Fall of 1983, when the network began airing *All-American Wrestling*. Like most sports-entertainment programs of the era, *All-American Wrestling* typically showcased well-established Superstars battling lesser-known names. The formula would be foreign to today's fans, but worked tremendously in the 1980s.

"Kay Koplovitz was almost embarrassed that wrestling was getting the highest ratings on her network," says Shane McMahon. "She didn't want to get rid of the ratings, but she didn't want to do anything to promote us. That's kind of how we felt, unwanted."

The fragile WWE-USA partnership continued into the Monday Night Wars. At the time, both WWE and WCW were fighting for survival, and Ted Turner responded by doing everything he could to promote *Nitro* across his brands. The pride in which Turner promoted his show only helped magnify WWE's belief that USA should've done more.

"We were the top-rated show on USA every week," says Jim Ross. "But they took us for granted. They shouldn't have; they should've defended us."

WWE and USA ultimately severed ties in September 2000, marking the end of a nearly twenty-year partnership. For WWE, one of the contributing factors to switching networks was the enthusiasm in which The Nashville Network (TNN) courted them. TNN recognized WWE as the cornerstone programming they needed for a potential network rebranding.



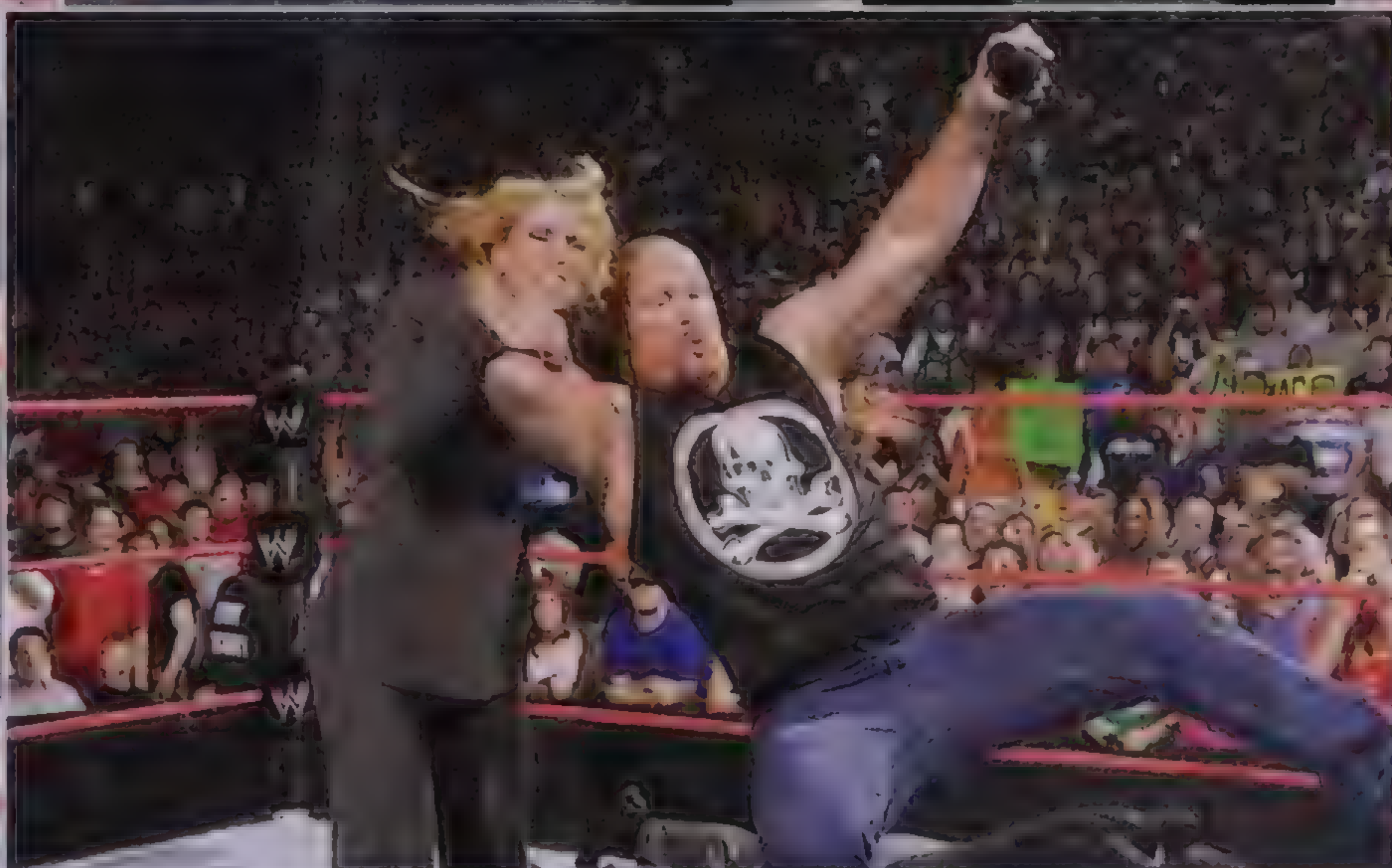
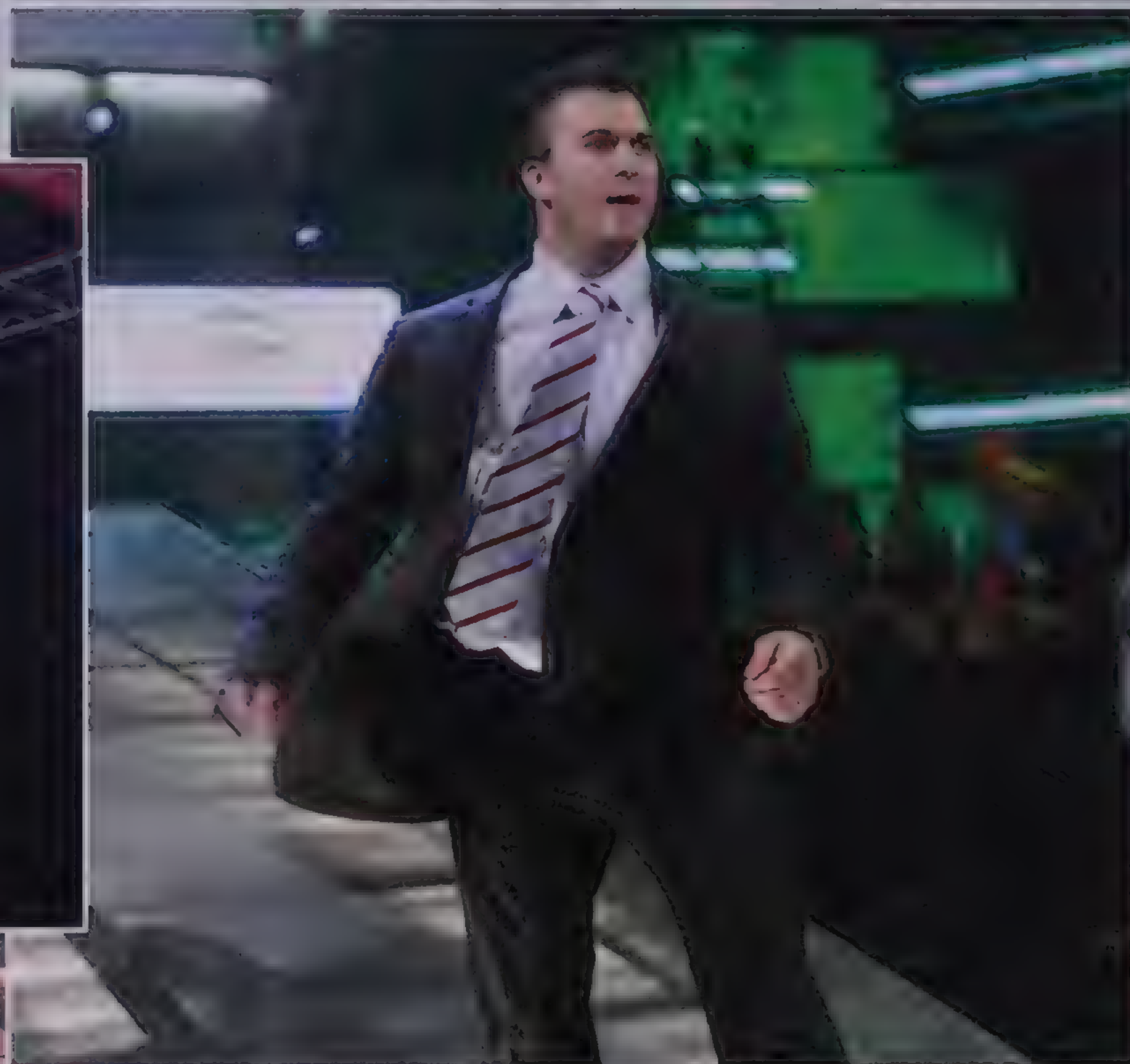
Vince McMahon in his office

Once the ink dried on the deal, TNN quickly kicked its country music vibe en route to rebranding itself as The National Network, and WWE went to work on bringing the new-look network more viewers than ever before, which didn't take long. On September 25, 2000, WWE's first-ever *Raw* on TNN featured Intercontinental, World Tag Team, and WWE Championship defenses. The combination of high-profile matches resulted in a whopping 5.4 rating, the highest in the nearly twenty-year history of any incarnation of the network.

"We were lured away from USA to really be a part of something. It was nice to be wanted," recalls Shane McMahon. "WWE raised the awareness of TNN; we became the anchor for them to launch other shows. And that's exactly what happened; ratings went up and for the first time, everyone saw WWE as a value of how to make a staple."

TNN rebranded yet again in 2003 to become Spike TV, with their goal as a network to focus exclusively on attracting young males viewers. Through it all, WWE maintained a strong partnership with the network, but as the contract began to inch toward the end of its term, WWE and USA couldn't help but imagine what a reunion might be like.

"USA saw the power of what we did on Spike," says Shane McMahon. "They really wanted to partner with us in doing things under the relationship of NBC and Universal. [NBC Universal executives] Bonnie Hammer, Jeff Zucker, Dick Ebersol, Ken Schanzer...they were all proponents of the WWE brand."



Steve Austin Stuns all four McMahons in the first-ever three-hour *Raw* on USA

With a newfound appreciation for each other, the two media giants embarked on part two of their journey on October 3, 2005, when the first-ever three-hour *Raw* hit the USA airwaves. Appropriately titled *WWE Homecoming*, the show featured a 30-minute Iron Man Match between Kurt Angle and Shawn Michaels, as well as some of history's biggest names, including Roddy Piper, Hulk Hogan, and Ric Flair. It also hosted one of *Raw*'s most memorable moments: Steve Austin Stunning all four McMahons.

"I wasn't thrilled that Steve would do that to my sister, and especially not my mom," recalls Shane McMahon. "But my dad was hell bent on doing the right thing for business and it was our re-launch on USA and he wanted to have a big moment. It was fun to do, but I'm just thankful everyone was okay."

BEYOND THE RING

A SPORTS-ENTERTAINMENT EMPIRE

While WWE's core product traditionally takes place within the confines of a twenty-foot by twenty-foot ring, the sports-entertainment empire is so much more than simply a wrestling company.

WORLD BODYBUILDING FEDERATION

1990 - 1992

Originally introduced in late 1990, the WBF strived to revolutionize the bodybuilding industry by injecting it with similar entertainment values WWE used during its rise to prominence. Unlike other bodybuilding competitions that were limited to strictly posing and flexing, the WBF introduced heavy character development for its BodyStars, complete with catchy nicknames, such as "The Jet Man," "Dark Journey," and "The Executioner." Over the course of its near-two year existence, the WBF broadcast two pay-per-view events, both of which were won by accomplished bodybuilder Gary Strydom.

It just never really took off because it was that blend of WWE's entertainment, scripted television. Bodybuilding was more pure sport and the two just never married, even in spite of WWE developing its own supplement line, ICOPRO.

—Linda McMahon



Lex Luger



WBF



WWE TOUGH ENOUGH

2001 – 2004, 2011

Over the course of its five seasons, *Tough Enough* became recognized as one of the most groundbreaking shows in sports-entertainment history. Premiering on MTV in 2001, the hit reality show gave viewers a never-before-seen glimpse into the intense training required to become a WWE Superstar. Along the way, young men and women competed to be crowned *Tough Enough* Champion and earn a coveted WWE contract. Notable names that have reached the WWE roster via *Tough Enough* include The Miz, John Morrison, and Josh Mathews.



THE WORLD

1999 – 2003

Located in the heart of New York City's famed Times Square, The World was a WWE-themed restaurant and nightclub. The locale also served as the site of many WWE events, particularly *Sunday Night Heat*.



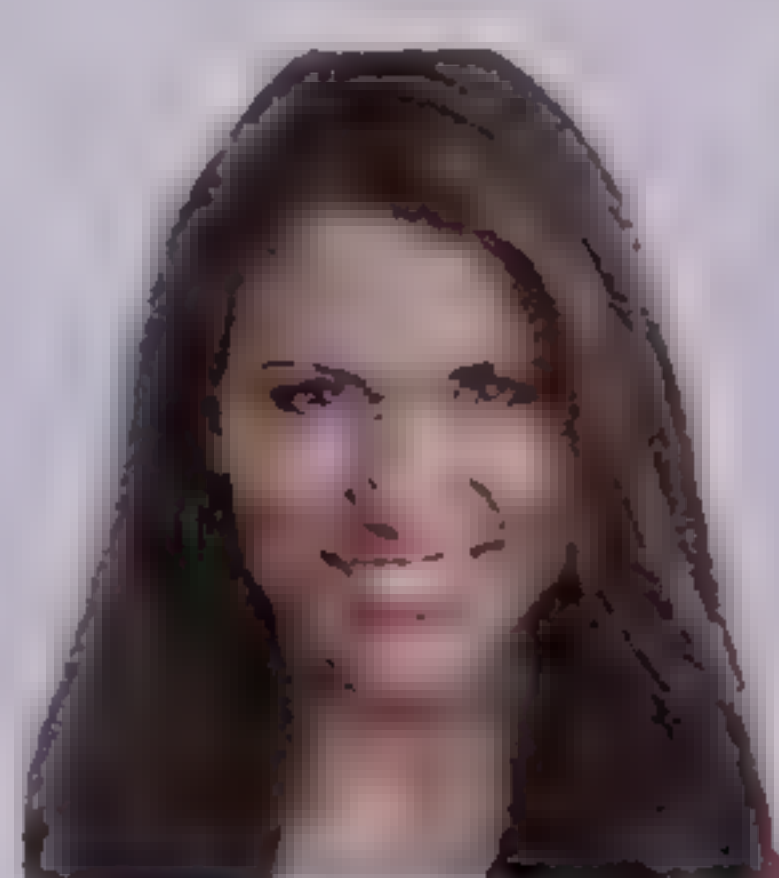
XFL

2000 - 2001

An eight-team professional football league jointly ran by WWE and NBC, the XFL was designed to accentuate the game football fans craved through action-enhancing rule changes and unprecedented access into huddles and locker rooms.

The premise is still sound. After the Super Bowl, where do you get your football fix? The XFL could've been that answer.

—Stephanie McMahon



The revolutionary league only ran for one season. In its sole championship game, the Tommy Maddox led Los Angeles Xtreme defeated the San Francisco Demons 38-6 to claim the \$1 million prize. In addition to Maddox, several other XFL players went on to enjoy NFL success, including Rod "He Hate Me" Smart, Yo Murphy, and Isaac Davis.



While it initially garnered strong ratings, the XFL quickly fell apart. However, it's influence is still being felt years later, particularly in the NFL, who regularly utilizes the sky cam, a technique first used in the XFL.

WWE NIAGARA FALLS

2002 - 2011

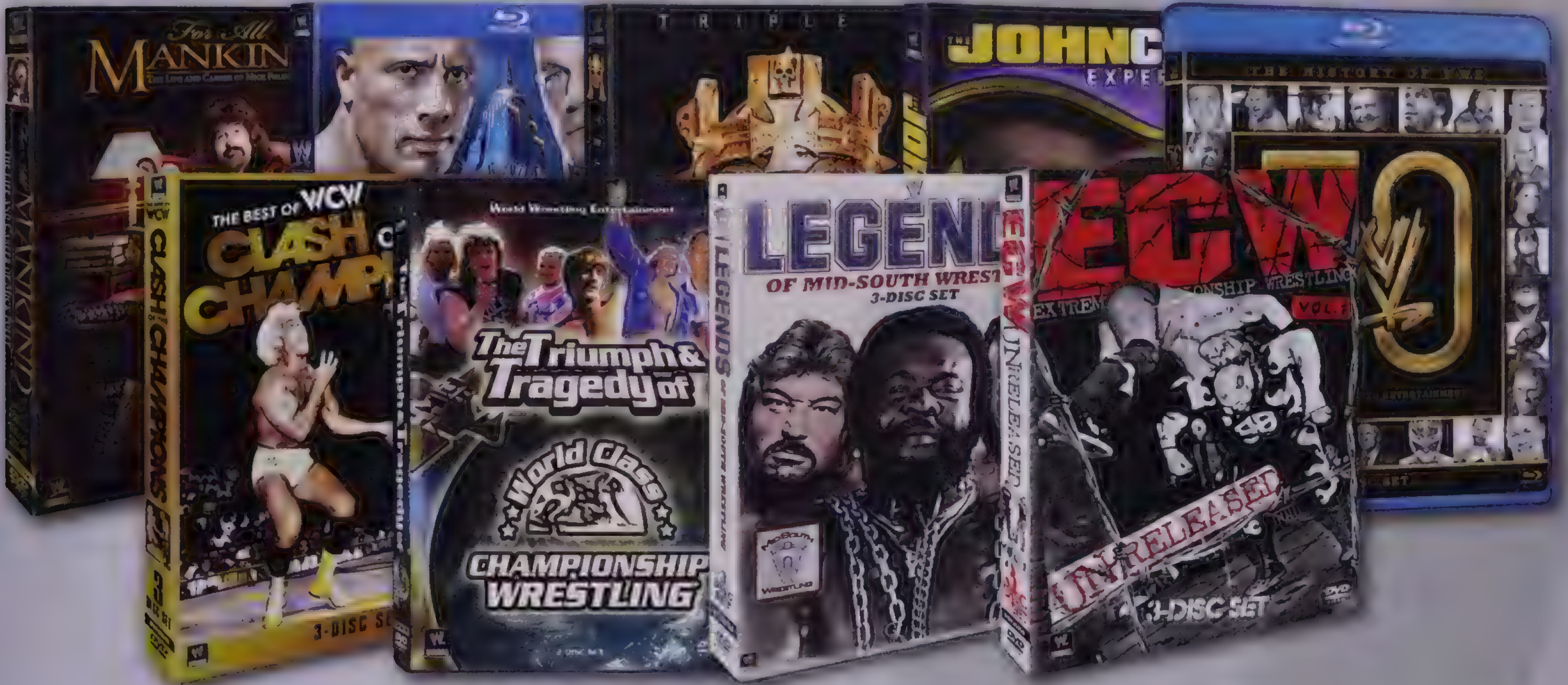
Located in Ontario, Canada, WWE Niagara Falls featured the unique combination of more than 4,000 square feet of retail space and a heart-pounding 220-foot drop amusement ride called The Pile Driver.



WWE LIBRARIES/WWE HOME VIDEO

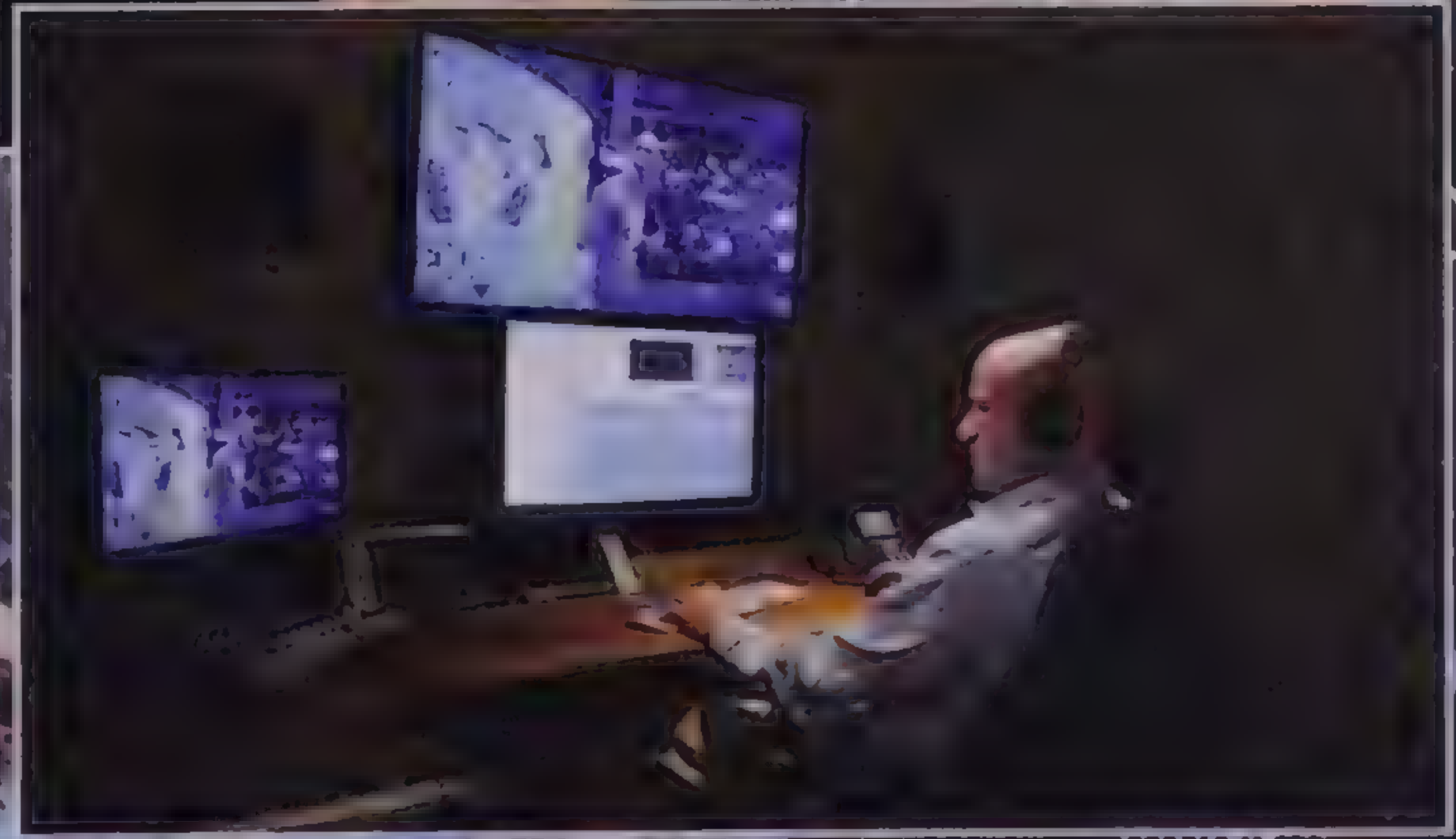
2001 – Present

Following in the footsteps of Coliseum Home Video, WWE produces and distributes pay-per-view events, documentaries, and specials. In all, WWE has produced more than 450 home video titles.



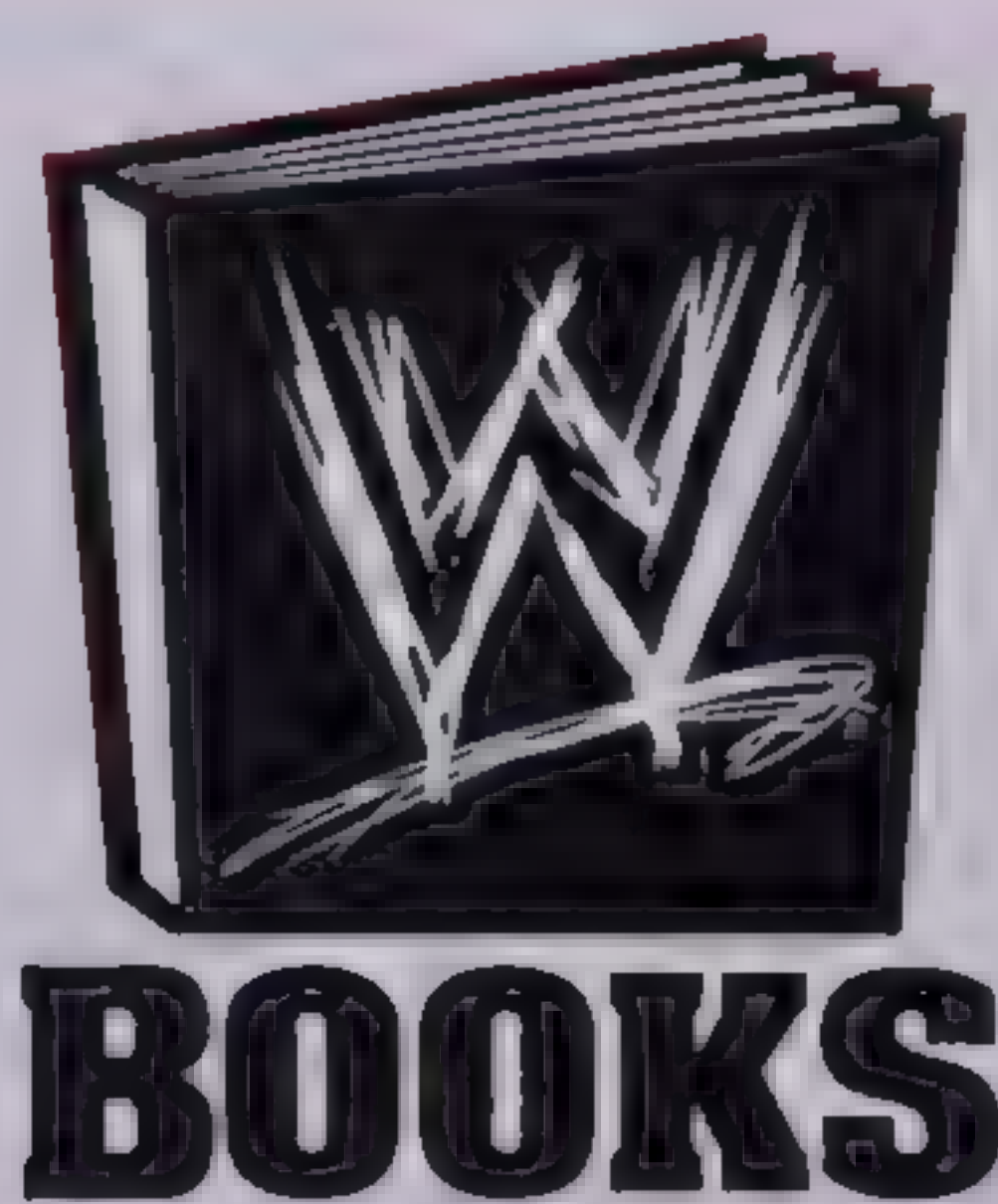
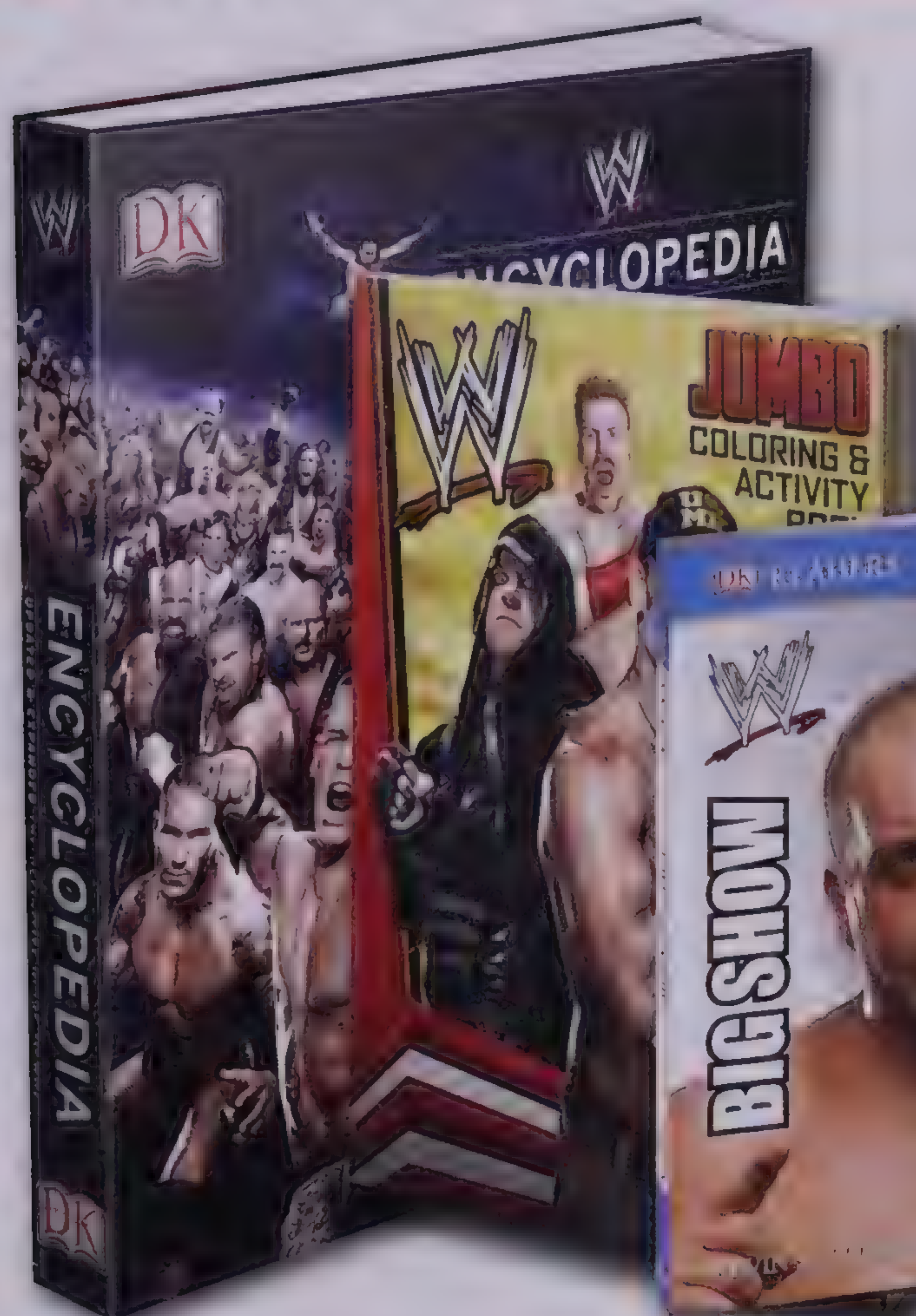
With more than 100,000 hours of content, WWE Libraries is the largest collection of sports-entertainment video in the world. In addition to owning all of its own footage, dating back to Capitol Wrestling Corporation, WWE also owns such libraries as:

- › World Championship Wrestling
- › American Wrestling Association
- › Extreme Championship Wrestling
- › Stampede Wrestling
- › World Class Championship Wrestling
- › Georgia Championship Wrestling
- › Mid-South Wrestling

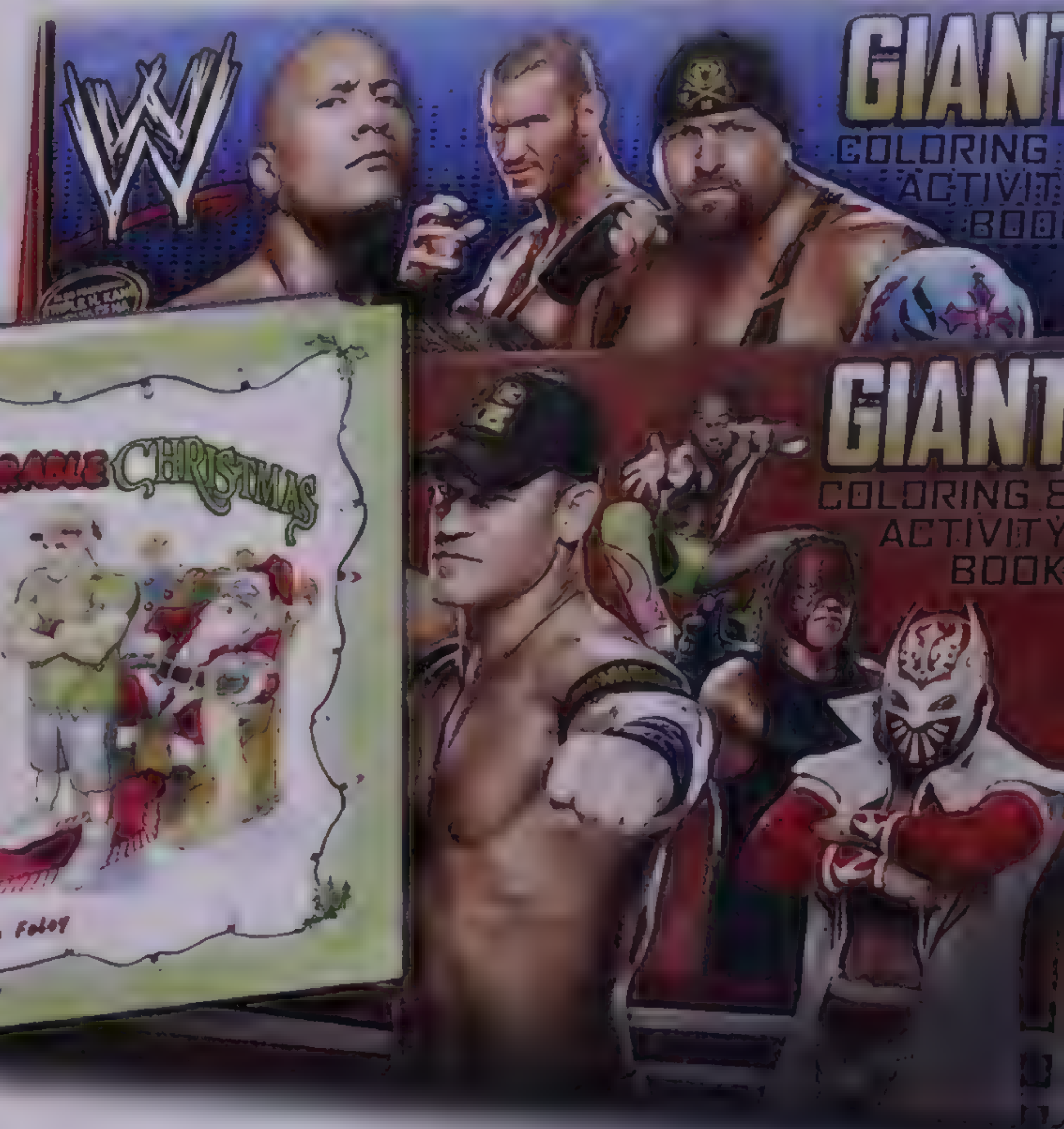


WWE BOOKS

2002 – Present



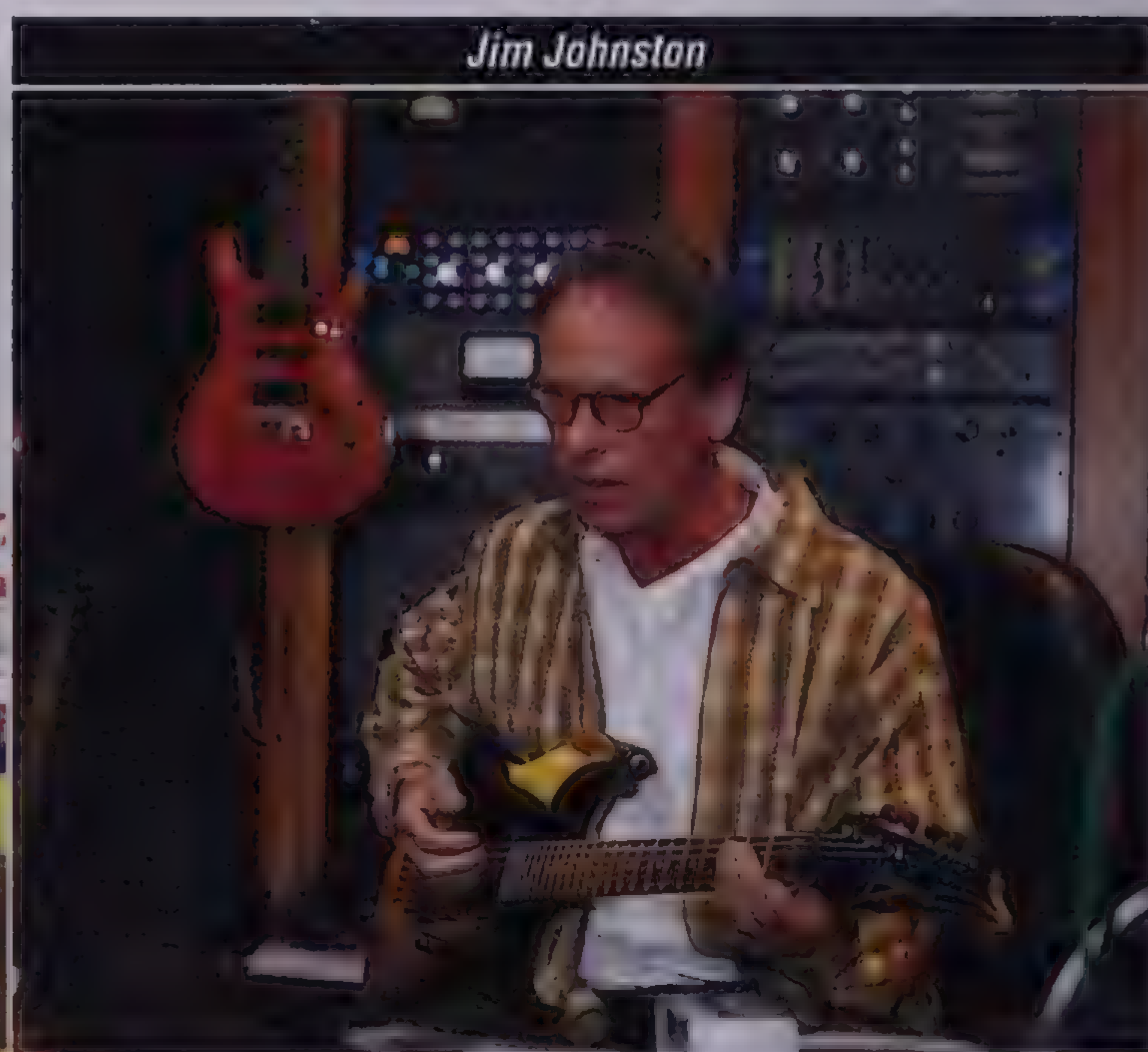
Launched in 2002, WWE Books publishes multiple titles yearly, based on WWE programming, history, and personalities. Over the years, more than twenty WWE books have landed on the coveted New York Times Best Sellers list.



WWE MUSIC GROUP

2006 – Present

The successor of SmackDown Records, WWE Music Group links the WWE brand with popular music across all media platforms. In addition, the division has released dozens of albums and singles, most of which feature the music of WWE composer Jim Johnston. A WWE mainstay of nearly three decades, Johnston has been the mastermind behind nearly every song ever associated with WWE, including the theme songs for Undertaker, D-Generation X, and Randy Orton.

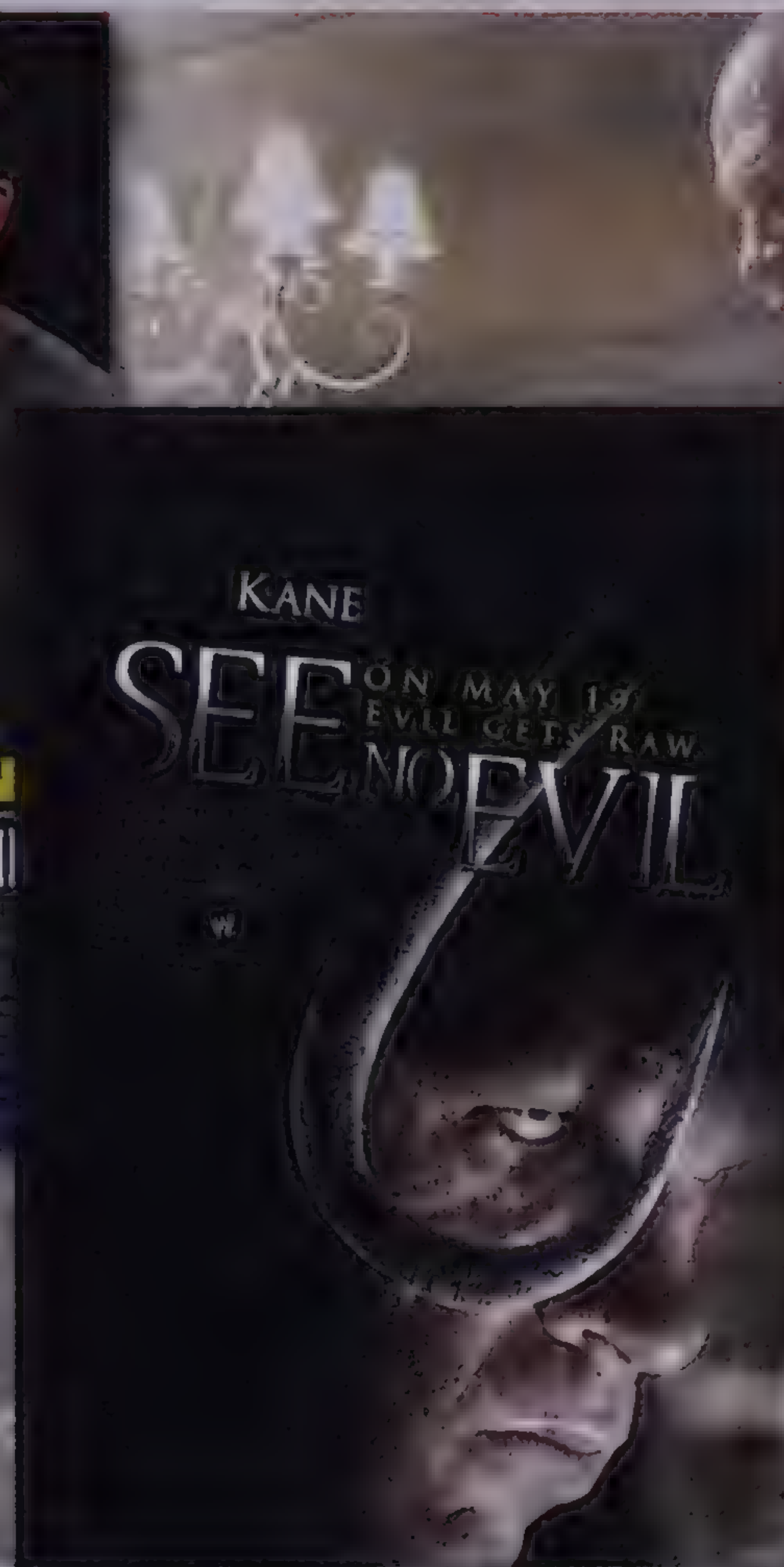
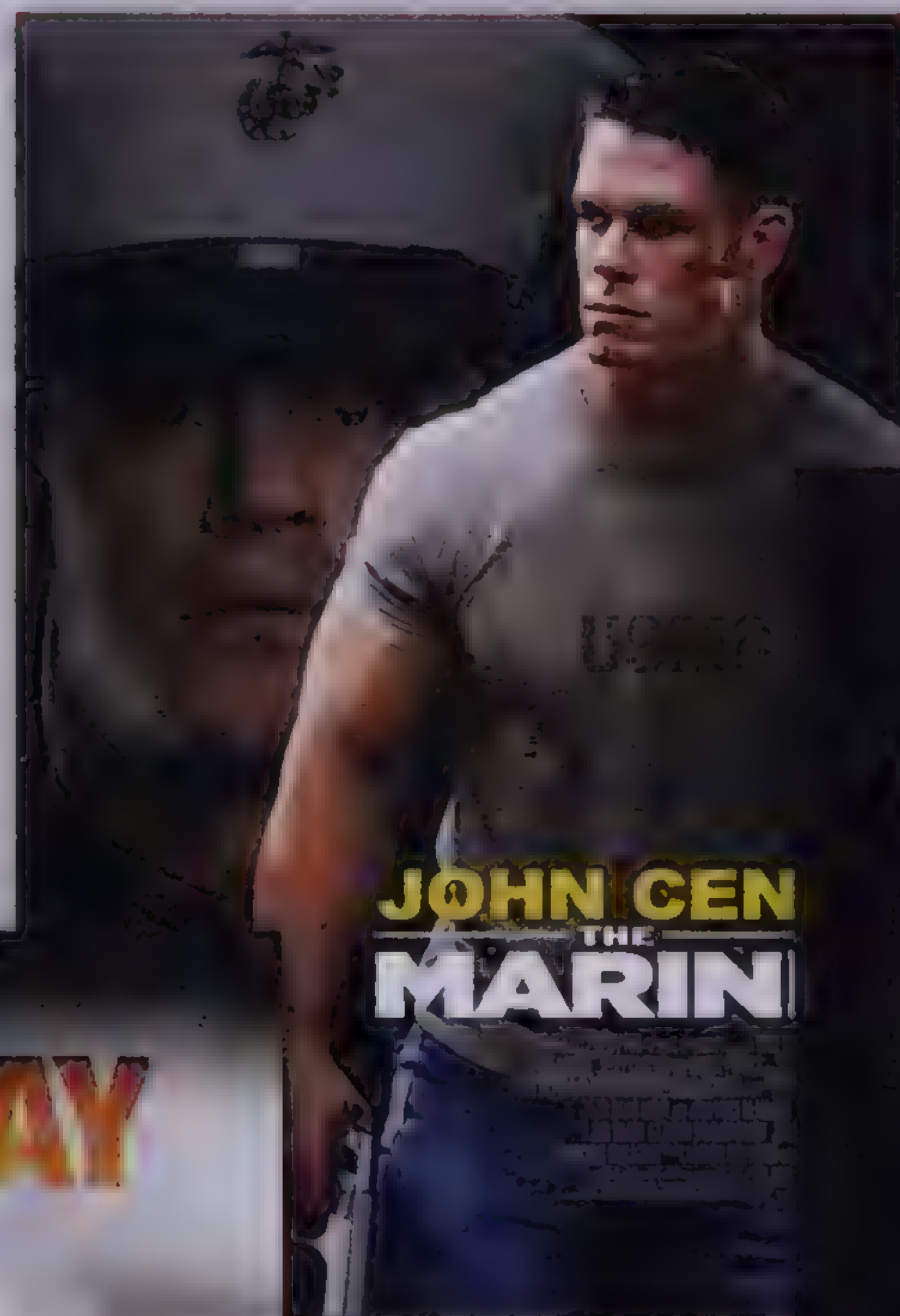
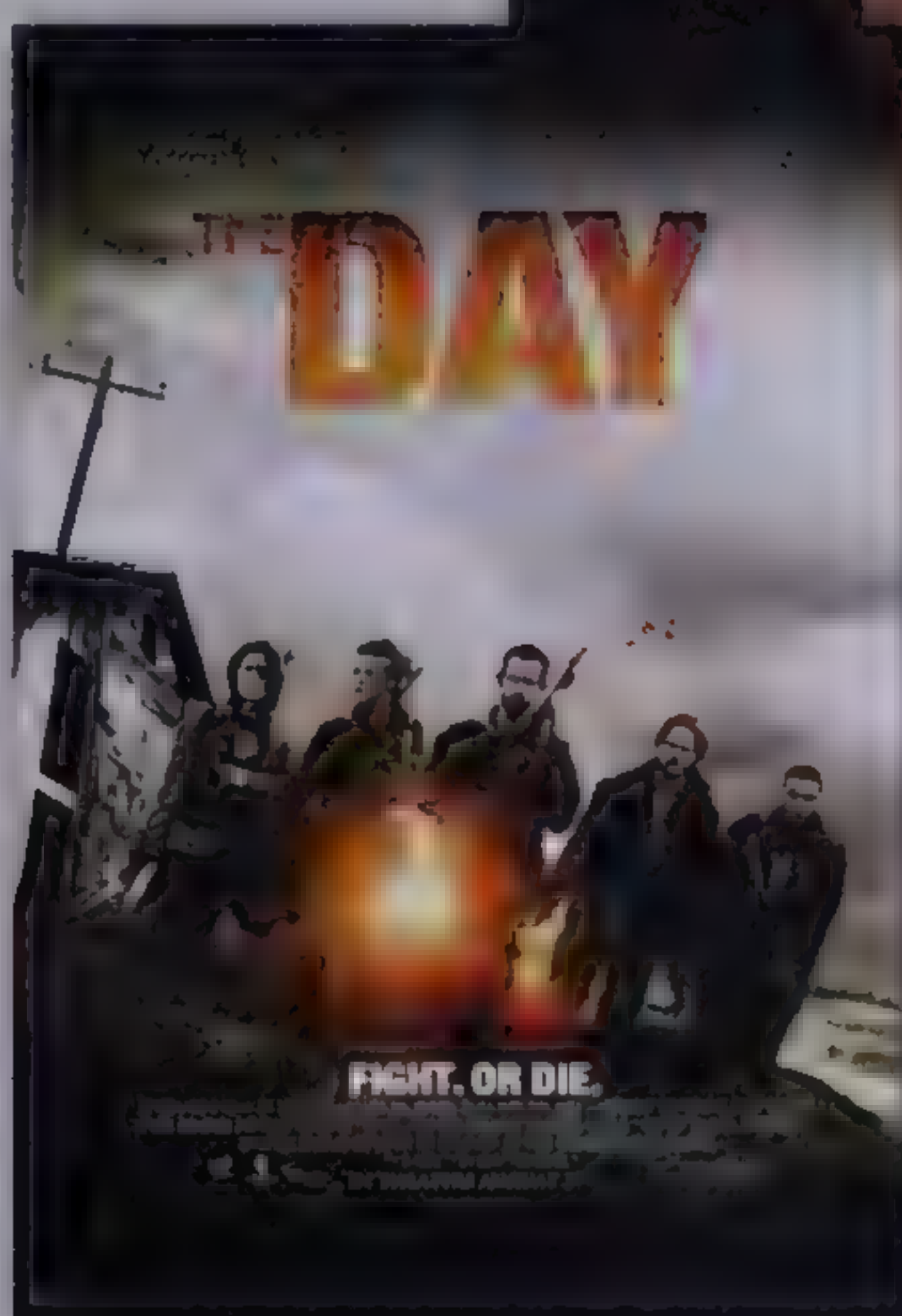


WWE STUDIOS

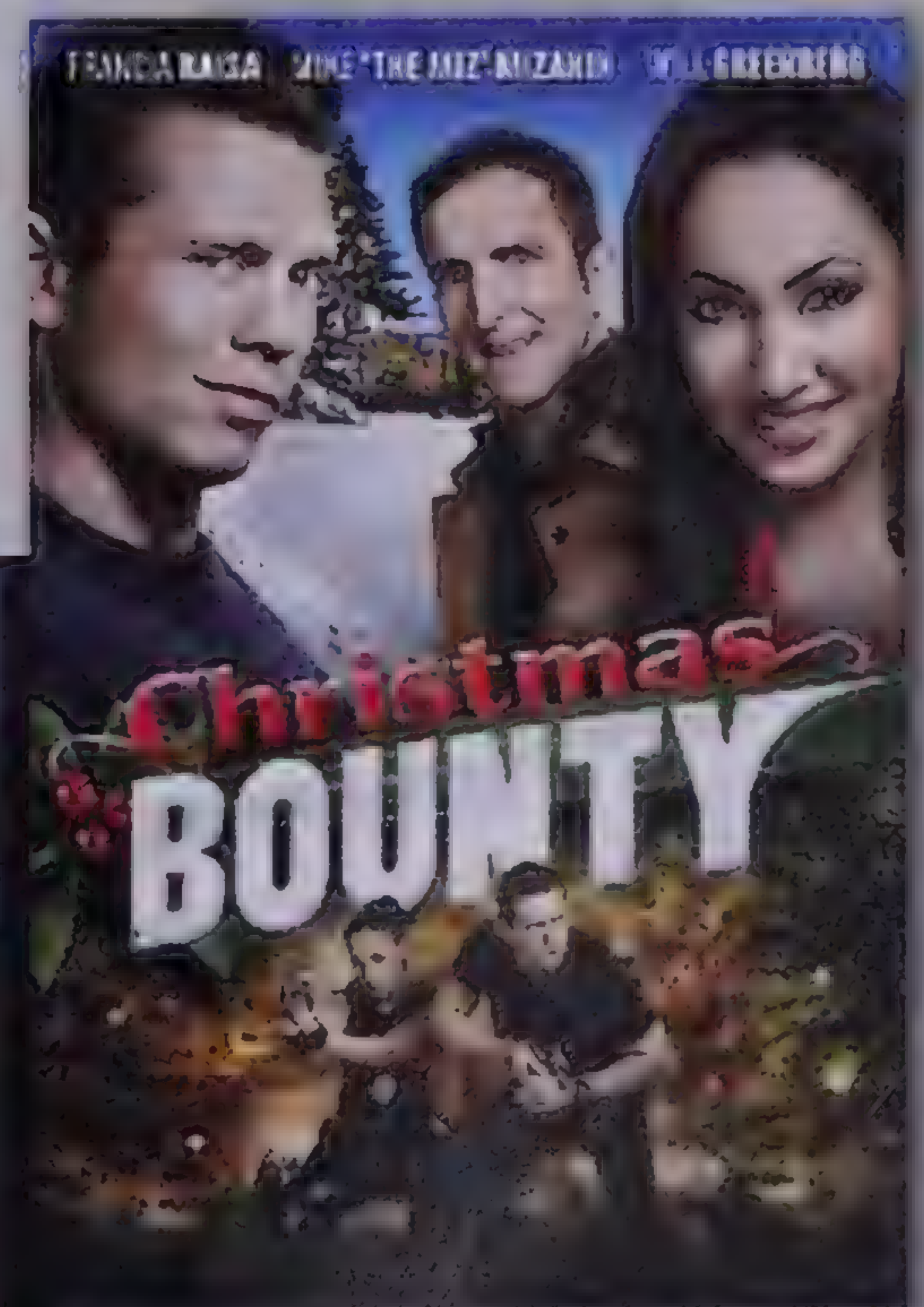
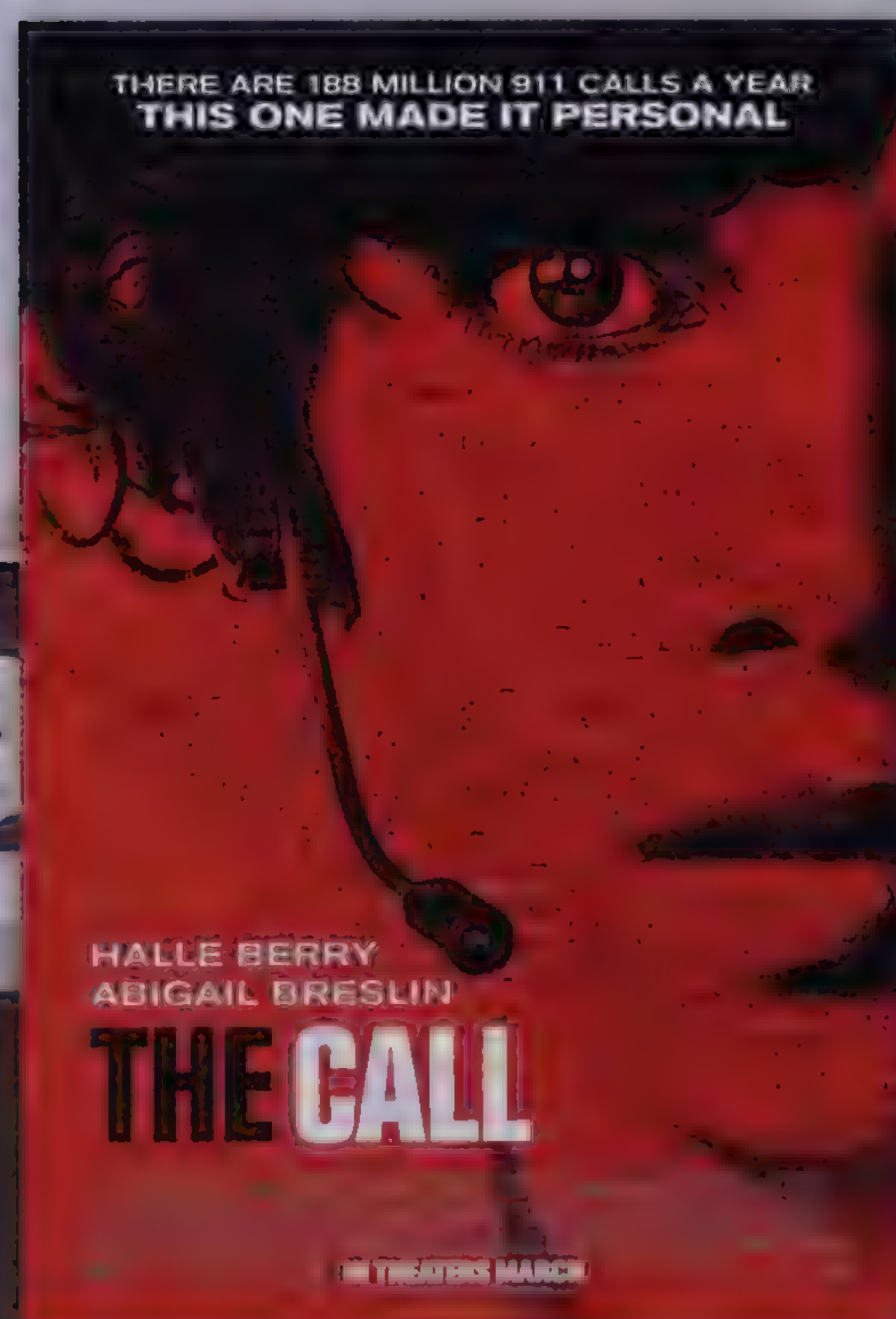
2002 - Present

Featuring both theatrical releases and direct-to-home premieres, WWE Studios has been involved in the production of more than twenty-five films. Among its most popular productions include:

- › *The Call* (2013) with Halle Barry and David Otunga
- › *See No Evil* (2006) with Kane
- › *The Marine* (2006) with John Cena
- › *Dead Man Down* (2013) with Colin Farrell and Wade Barrett

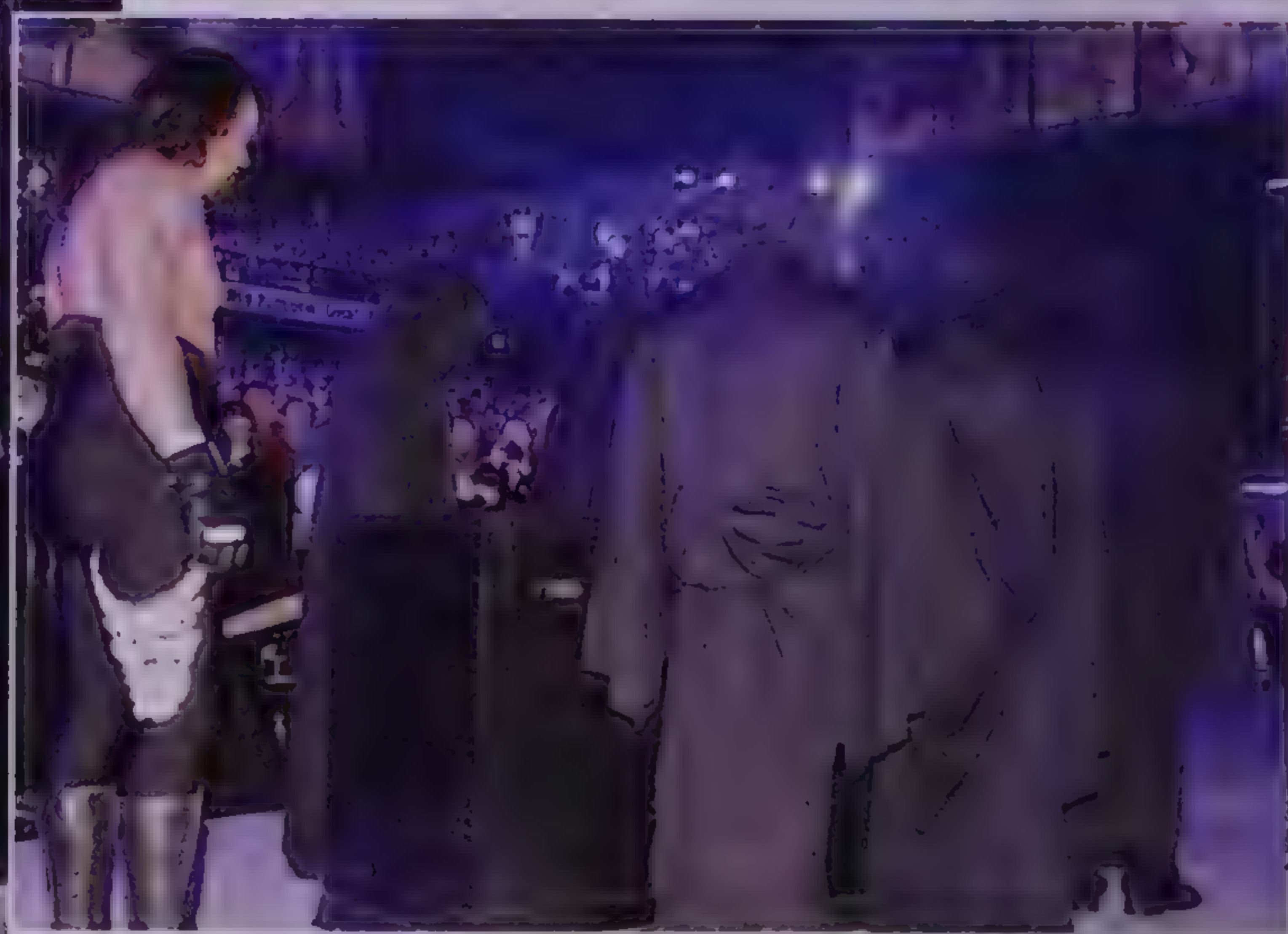
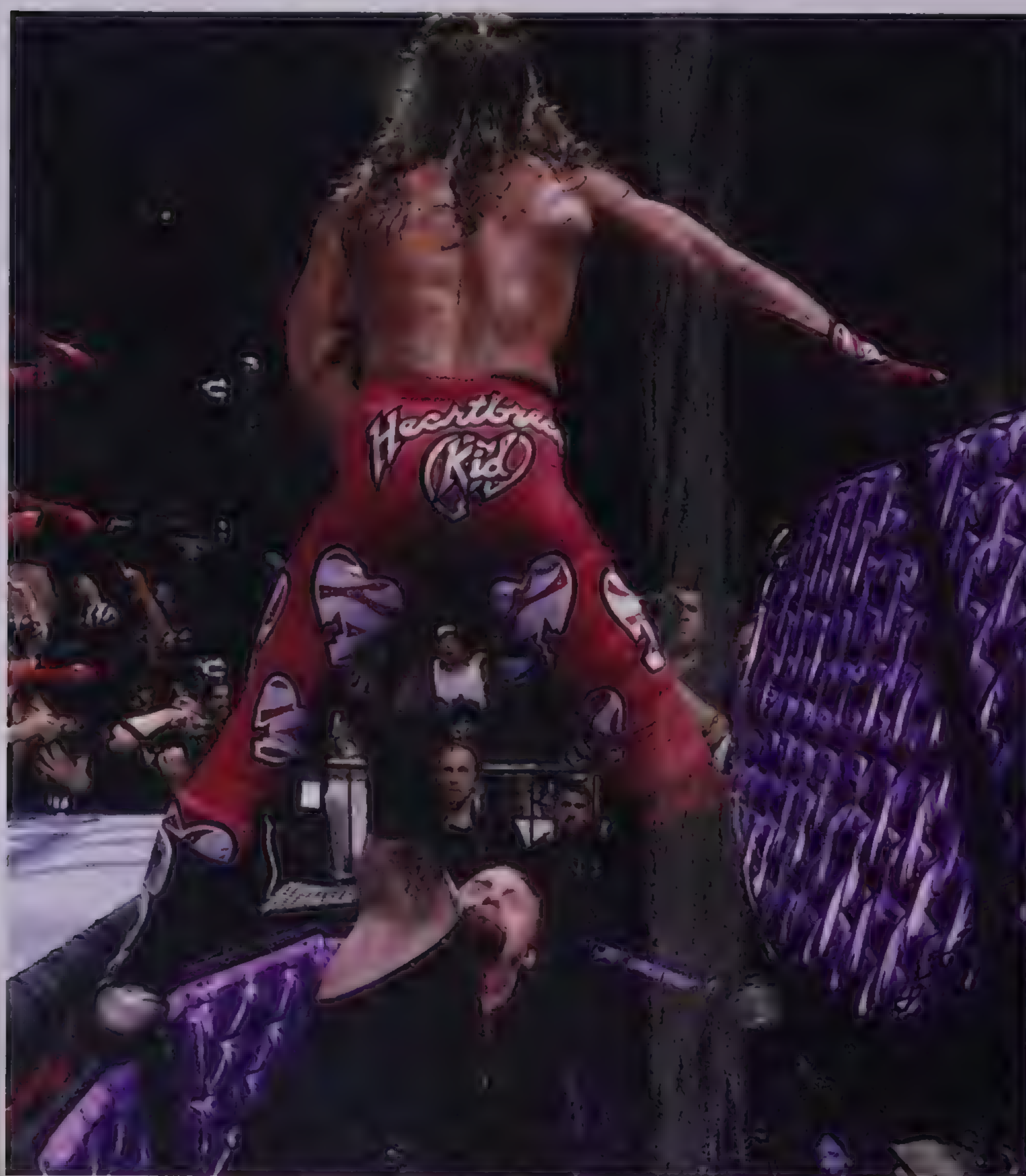


WWE Studios teamed up with ABC Family to create the action-filled comedy, *Christmas Bounty*, starring The Miz, and received critical acclaim for the movie, *The Call*.



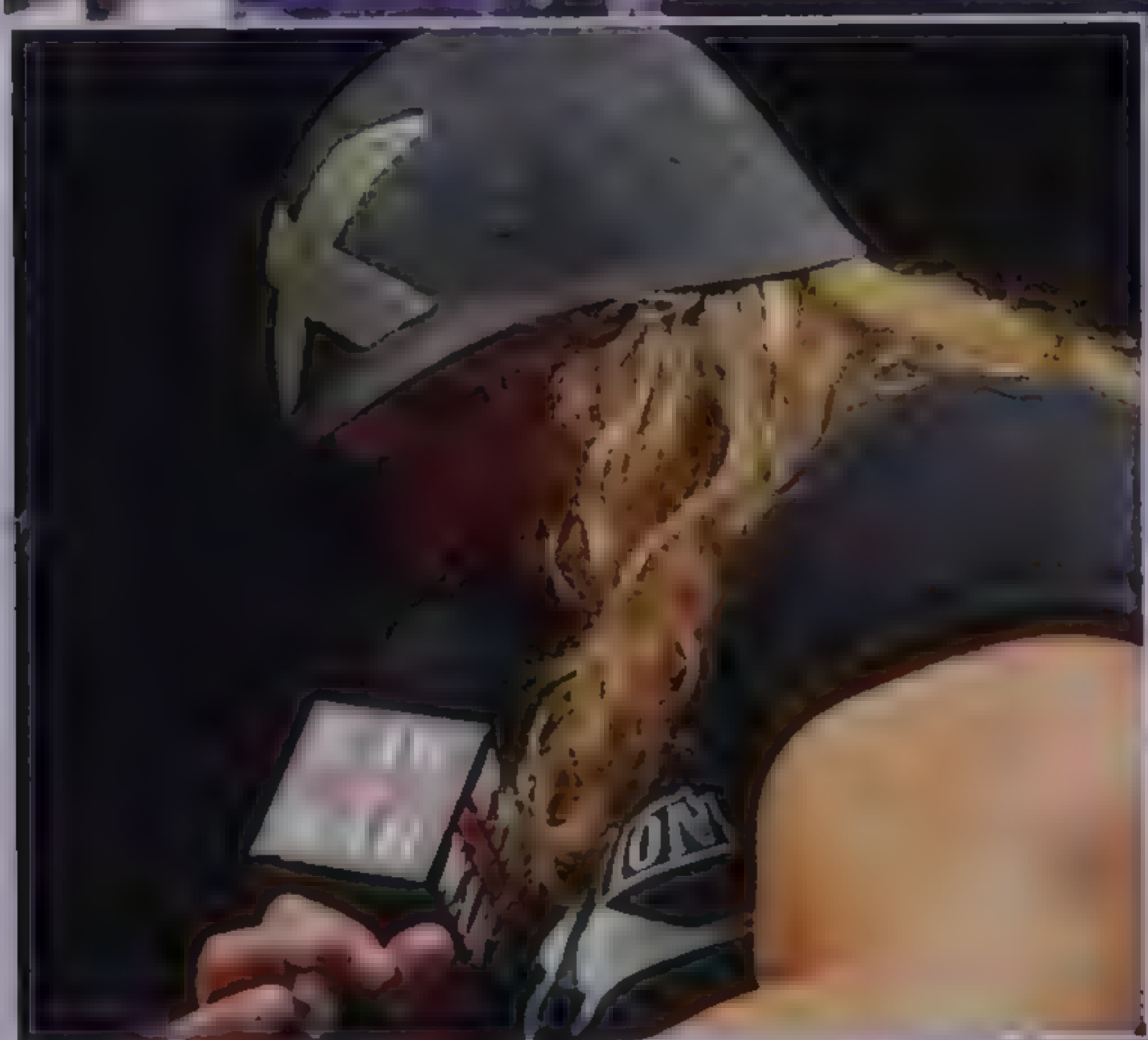
THE ARCHIVES

WWE's archives is home to countless items from sports-entertainment's past, including ring skirts, The Rock's race car, APA's beer keg, pay-per-view in-arena signage, the Royal Rumble tumbler, and more.

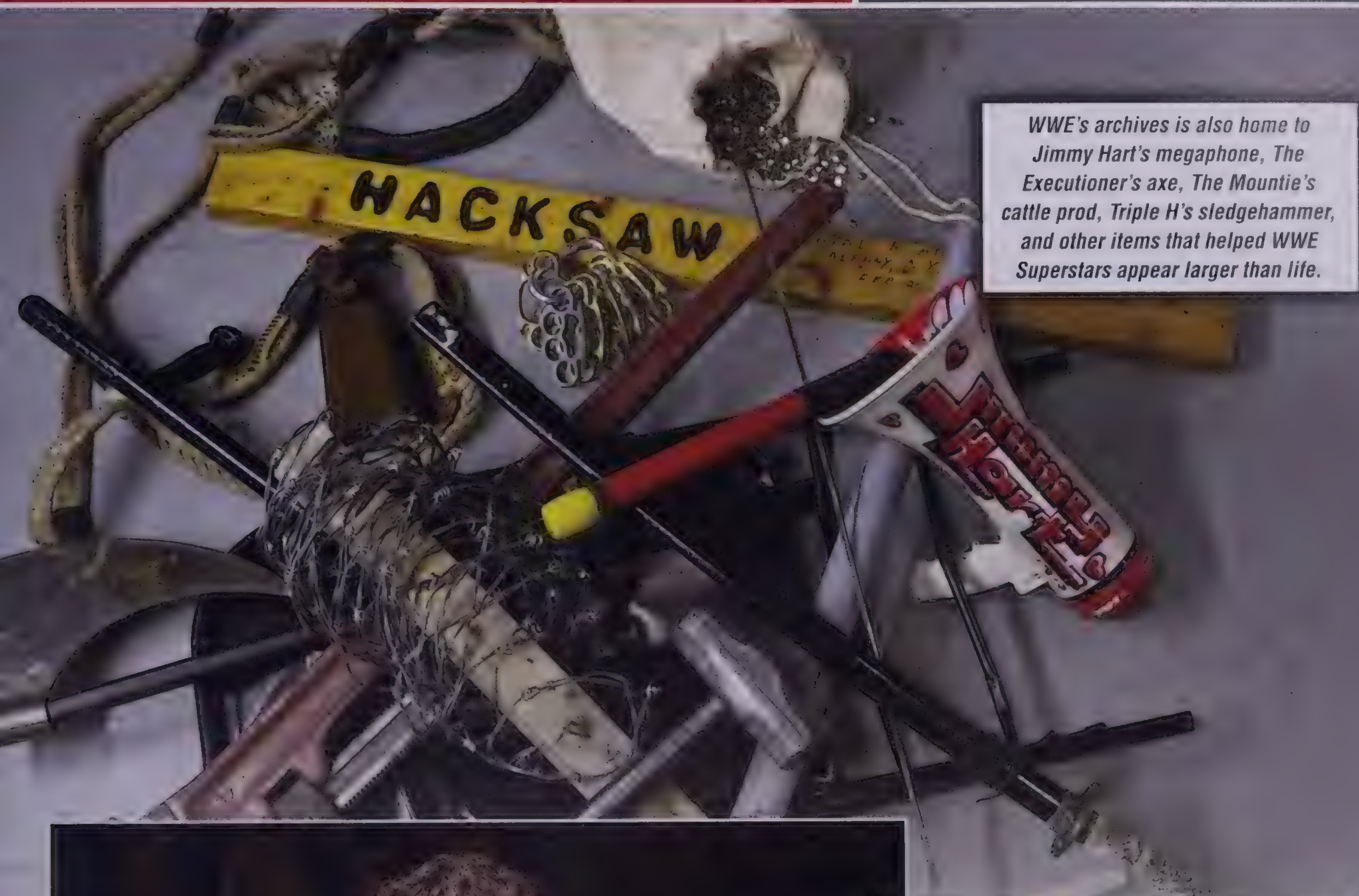


Mark Henry, Kane, The Rock, Big Show, and Undertaker, among others, have all found themselves trapped inside the caskets that now reside in their final resting spot in the vast archives of the WWE.

The WWE has enough clothes in its archives to open its own department store. Among the most historic items include Mick Foley's referee shirt, Trish Stratus' hats, DX's helmets, Undertaker's hat, and robes from Ric Flair and The Genius.





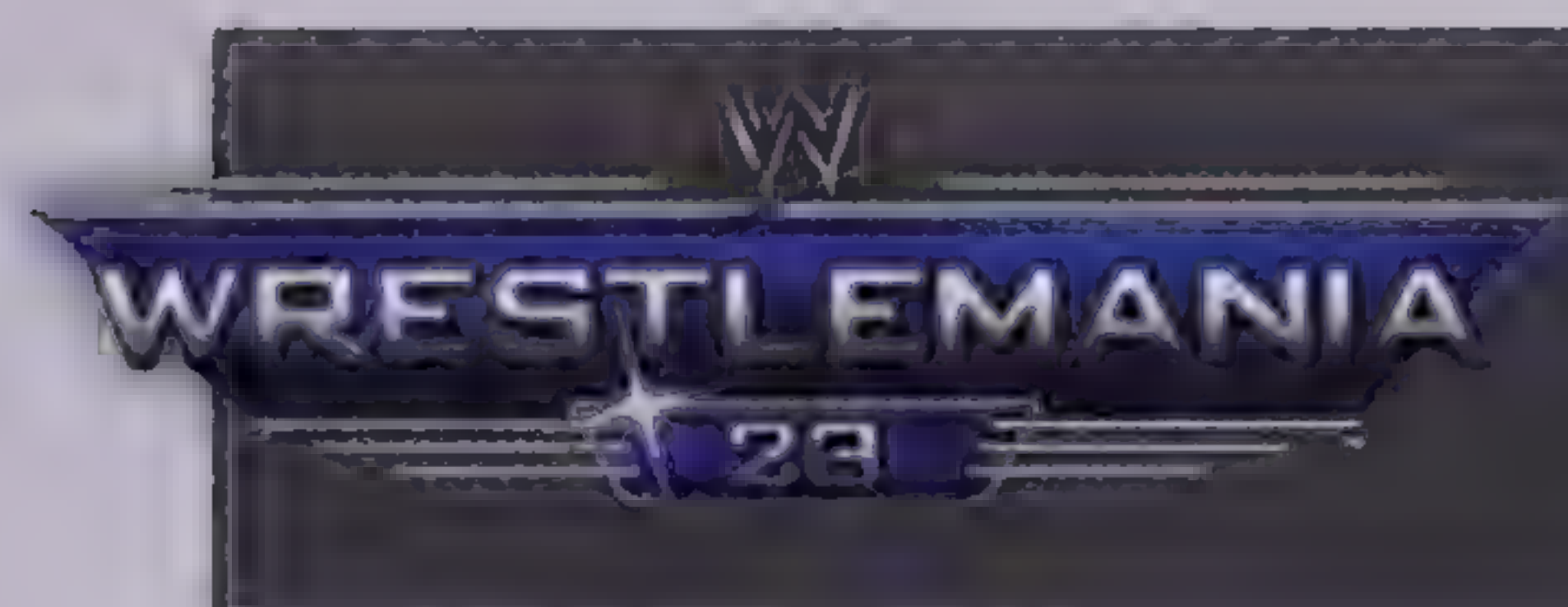


WWE's archives is also home to Jimmy Hart's megaphone, The Executioner's axe, The Mountie's cattle prod, Triple H's sledgehammer, and other items that helped WWE Superstars appear larger than life.



WRESTLEMANIA

23-XXX



Venue: Ford Field – Detroit, MI

Attendance: 80,103

WRESTLEMANIA 23

APRIL 1, 2007

Twenty years after *WrestleMania III* broke the indoor attendance record, WWE's crown jewel returned to Detroit to shatter yet another record when 80,103 fans packed Ford Field for *WrestleMania 23*. Never before had so many people filled the venue for a single event, and they were all there to see Donald Trump shave Mr. McMahon's head in the middle of the ring. In what was dubbed "The Battle of the Billionaires," Bobby Lashley, with Donald Trump in his corner, faced Umaga, with Mr. McMahon in his corner. The losing Billionaire would be forced to have his head shaved bald.

BATTLE OF THE BILLIONAIRES

HAIR VS. HAIR MATCH:

› Bobby Lashley defeated Umaga



Getting my head shaved was the right thing to do. There was a lot of talk about Donald and his hair at the time, so it made some sense to me from a promotional standpoint. Donald's hair versus my hair, and there was always the chance that Donald would have his hair cut or head shaved; the public wasn't too sure one way or the other. They thought they had it figured out, but they weren't too sure. I would do anything for the business; but I didn't realize that I have to be the ugliest baldheaded man in the world. I didn't realize at the time, but when I looked in the mirror, I saw my head was misshapen. My head has a point in the back of it. What the hell is that? And I have knots from various fights and stuff. I've got knots all over the back of my head, more on one side than the other. It's just deformed looking, and when I looked in the mirror I said, 'Oh my god, you are one ugly human being. What have you done to yourself?'

— Vince McMahon



MONEY IN THE BANK LADDER MATCH:

› Mr. Kennedy defeated Edge, CM Punk, King Booker, Jeff Hardy, Matt Hardy, Finlay, and Randy Orton

UNITED STATES CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Chris Benoit (c) defeated MVP

WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Undertaker defeated Batista (c)

WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP LUMBERJILL MATCH:

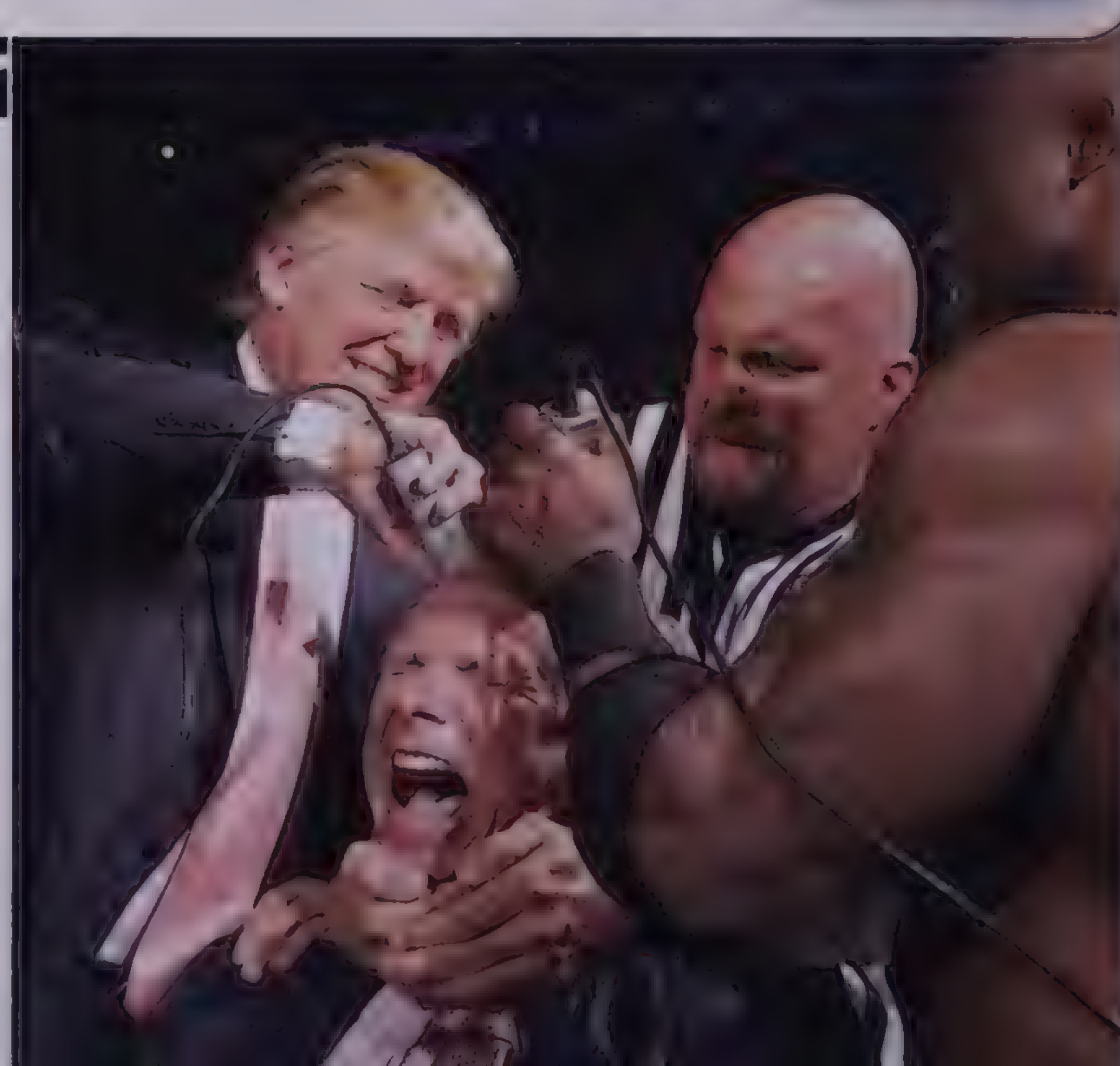
› Melina (c) defeated Ashley

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP: › John Cena (c) defeated Shawn Michaels

OTHER MATCHES:

› ECW Originals defeated The New Breed

› The Great Khali defeated Kane





Venue: Citrus Bowl – Orlando, FL

Attendance: 74,635

WRESTLEMANIA XXIV

MARCH 30, 2008

WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH:

▶ Undertaker defeated Edge (c)



For the first time since *WrestleMania IX*, WWE's biggest annual extravaganza was held outdoors when Orlando's Citrus Bowl hosted *WrestleMania XXIV*. The event proved to be an enormous success for both WWE and Orlando, as \$5.85 million were grossed in ticket sales, and members of the WWE Universe infused approximately \$51.5 million into the local economy. In the night's main event, Undertaker extended his *WrestleMania* undefeated streak to sixteen when he beat Edge for the World Heavyweight Championship.

It's my crowning moment, even more so than winning the World Title for the first time or the Tag Team Title or the Intercontinental Title. Those are all amazing and I will never forget them and it will always be embedded in my brain, but walking out there and just seeing the spectacle of it and the setup over the ring and how everything looked was amazing.

*"And to be looked at from not only the fans' perspective, but the company's perspective, as somebody who could be put in such a position against Undertaker feels amazing. It's them telling me they trust me with their baby that is *WrestleMania* and trust that I could take care of it. It was very surreal; I remember walking down to the ring and I lost feeling in my arms because I was so ramped up, I was so psyched up. I wasn't nervous, but the adrenaline was more than I have ever encountered. I couldn't feel my hands and I remember walking to the ring and looking at him; he was giving me the Undertaker stare and I was like, 'I can't feel my hands here. I have got to get these back before this match starts; this could be bad.' Thankfully they came back.*

— Edge



CAREER THREATENING MATCH:

▶ Shawn Michaels defeated Ric Flair



BELFAST BRAWL: ▶ JBL defeated Finlay

MONEY IN THE BANK LADDER MATCH:

▶ CM Punk defeated Shelton Benjamin, Chris Jericho, Carlito, MVP, Mr. Kennedy, and John Morrison

ECW CHAMPIONSHIP: ▶ Kane defeated Chavo Guerrero (c)

PLAYBOY BUNNYMANIA LUMBERJILL MATCH:

▶ Beth Phoenix and Melina defeated Maria and Ashley

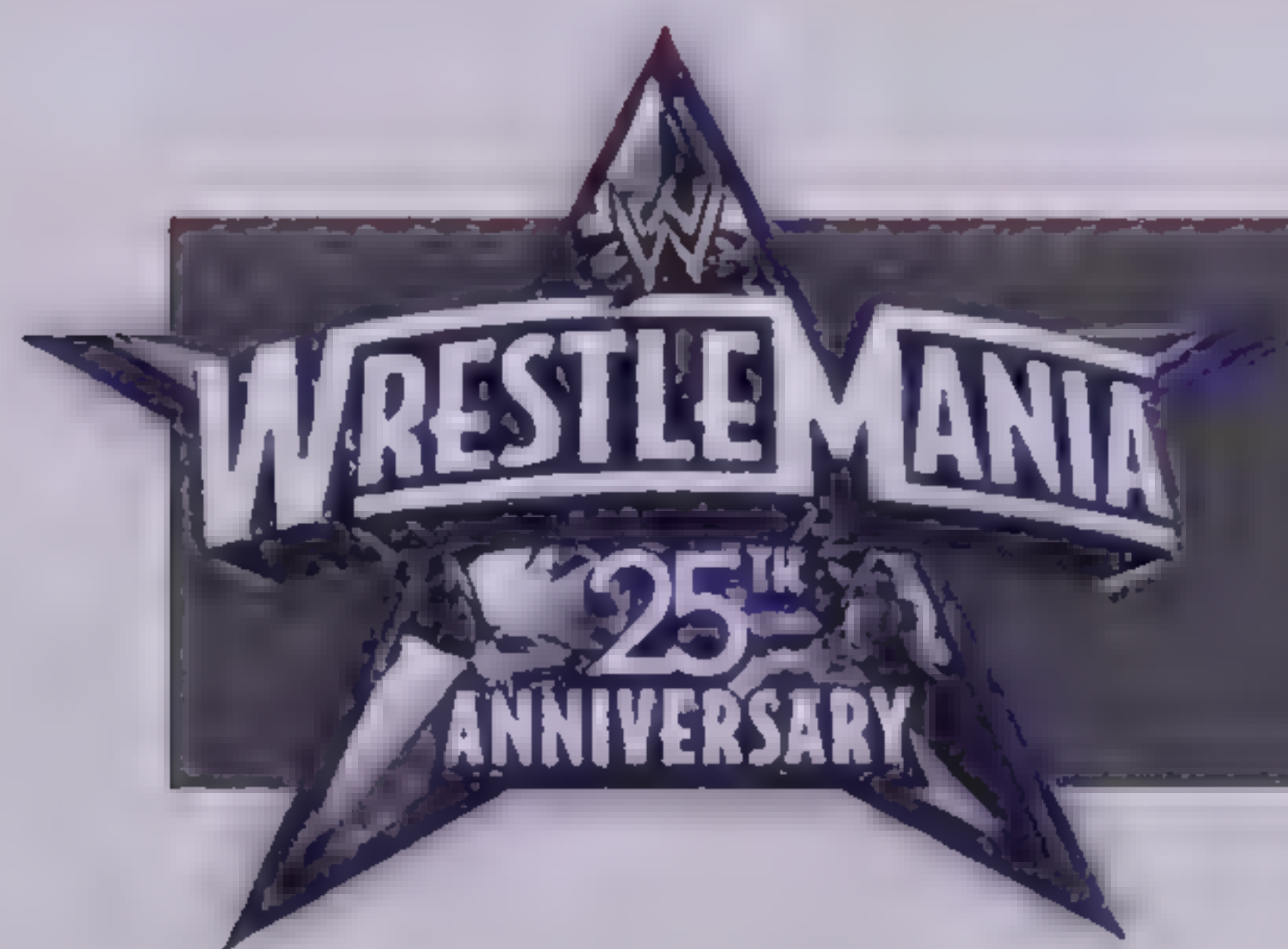
TRIPLE THREAT MATCH FOR THE WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

▶ Randy Orton (c) defeated John Cena and Triple H

OTHER MATCHES:

▶ Batista defeated Umaga

▶ Floyd "Money" Mayweather defeated Big Show by knockout



Venue: Reliant Stadium – Houston, TX
Attendance: 72,744

WRESTLEMANIA XXV
APRIL 5, 2007

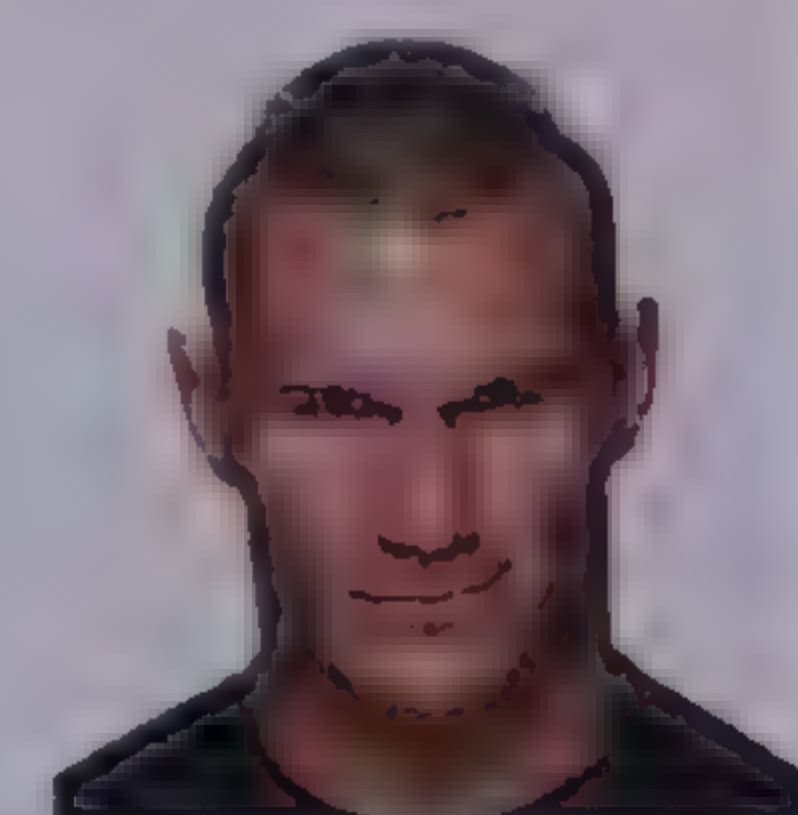
WrestleMania reached the quarter-century mark with one of the most emotionally-charged events in history. In addition to brothers Matt and Jeff Hardy battling in an Extreme Rules Match, legends Roddy Piper, Ricky Steamboat, and Jimmy Snuka fought Chris Jericho for the respect they worked decades to attain, and WWE Champion Triple H defended the honor of his family when he faced Randy Orton in the main event. But despite its lofty spot on the card, the WWE Championship Match was amazingly overshadowed by one of the greatest matches in sports-entertainment history.

TRIPLE THREAT MATCH FOR THE WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP:

▶ John Cena defeated Big Show and Edge (c)



I remember WrestleMania 25 when I main-evented with Triple H. Sure, I was in the main event, but Michaels against Undertaker was on a few matches before us and they stole the show. So there I was main-eventing the biggest show of the year and I didn't really have my moment. We laid three or four months of groundwork beforehand: I kicked Mr. McMahon in the head; I DDT'd Steph, gave her a kiss on the lips while she was knocked out and her husband, Triple H, was handcuffed just a few inches away; I bashed him in the skull with his sledgehammer. That's how we lead into WrestleMania. It was hot. Then we main-evented WrestleMania, and I didn't have my moment. Those people had everything sucked out of them from watching Shawn Michaels and Undertaker a few matches before.



— Randy Orton

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

▶ Triple H (c) defeated Randy Orton



MONEY IN THE BANK LADDER MATCH:

▶ CM Punk defeated Kane, Finlay, Mark Henry, MVP, Shelton Benjamin, Kofi Kingston, and Christian

DIVAS MISS WRESTLEMANIA BATTLE ROYAL:

▶ "Santina" Marella won

HANDICAP ELIMINATION MATCH:

▶ Chris Jericho defeated Jimmy Snuka, Roddy Piper, and Ricky Steamboat

EXTREME RULES MATCH:

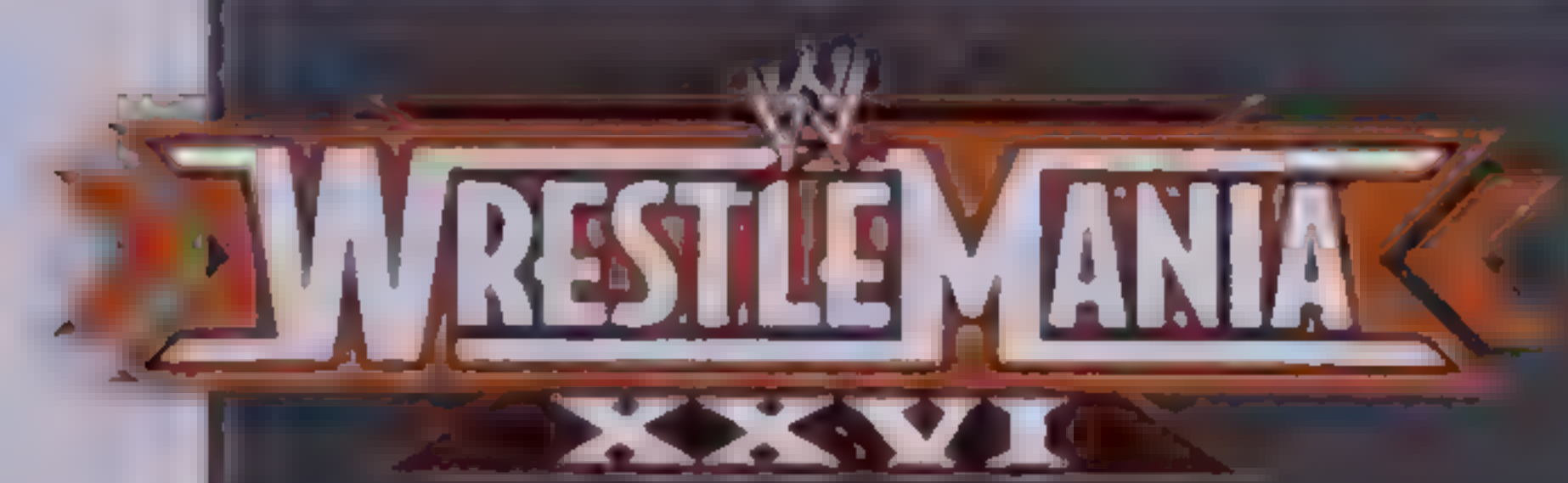
▶ Matt Hardy defeated Jeff Hardy

INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP:

▶ Rey Mysterio defeated JBL (c)



▶ Undertaker defended The Streak vs. Shawn Michaels



Venue: University of Phoenix Stadium – Phoenix, AZ

Attendance: 72,219

WRESTLEMANIA XXVI

MARCH 28, 2010

With one of the greatest Super Bowl's in NFL history taking place at the University of Phoenix Stadium a few years earlier, WWE knew they had their work cut out for them if *WrestleMania XXVI* was to be remembered as the venue's premiere event. Packed with 10 matches, including the highly-anticipated showdown between Mr. McMahon and Bret Hart, and the epic Undertaker-Shawn Michaels rematch, WWE responded in spades. *WrestleMania XXVI* ended up grossing \$5.8 million, becoming the highest grossing and attended entertainment event ever held at the stadium.

STREAK VS. CAREER MATCH:

› Undertaker defeated Shawn Michaels



UNIFIED TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP:

› Big Show and The Miz (c) defeated John Morrison and R-Truth

TRIPLE THREAT MATCH:

› Randy Orton defeated Ted DiBiase and Cody Rhodes

NO HOLDS BARRED LUMBERJACK MATCH:

› Bret Hart defeated Mr. McMahon

WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP: › Chris Jericho (c) defeated Edge

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP: › John Cena defeated Batista (c)

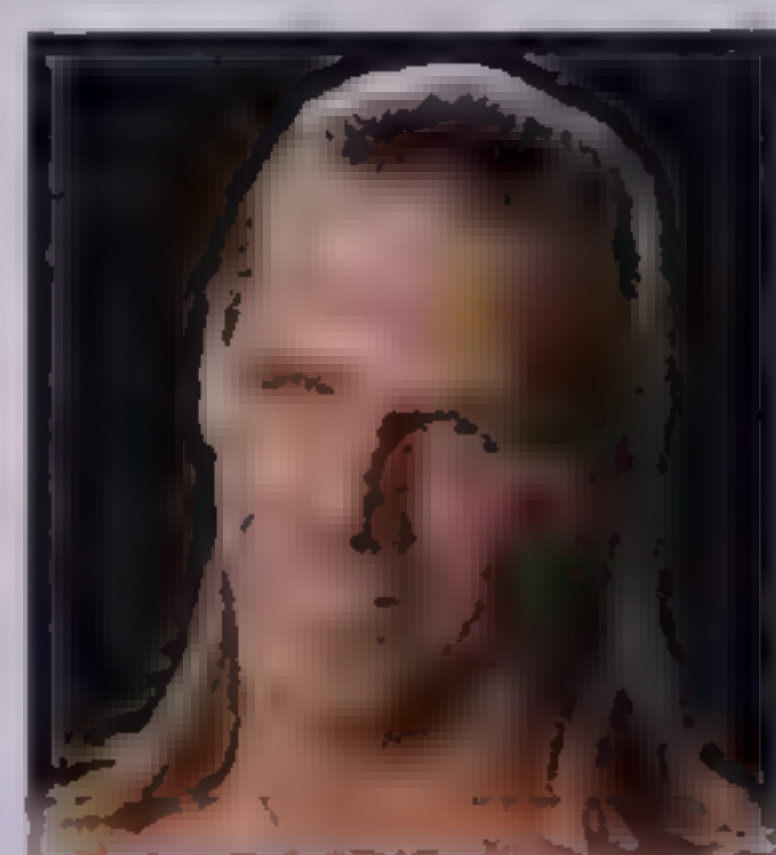
MONEY IN THE BANK LADDER MATCH:

› Jack Swagger defeated Christian, Drew McIntyre, Kofi Kingston, Dolph Ziggler, Shelton Benjamin, Kane, MVP, Evan Bourne, and Matt Hardy



"We were driving home after WrestleMania 25 and I told my wife that I thought that match maybe should've been my last one. She asked why; I told her that I didn't know if I could do anything better than that. It was just about perfect. And you always want to end on a high note"

"Thankfully, we got to do it again the next year with the Streak vs. Career Match. Those last two matches, they were very special moments."



— Shawn Michaels

OTHER MATCHES:

- › Triple H defeated Sheamus
- › Rey Mysterio defeated CM Punk
- › Michelle McCool, Alicia Fox, Layla, Maryse, and Vickie Guerrero defeated Beth Phoenix, Kelly Kelly, Eve, Mickie James, and Gail Kim





Venue: Georgia Dome – Atlanta, GA
Attendance: 71,617

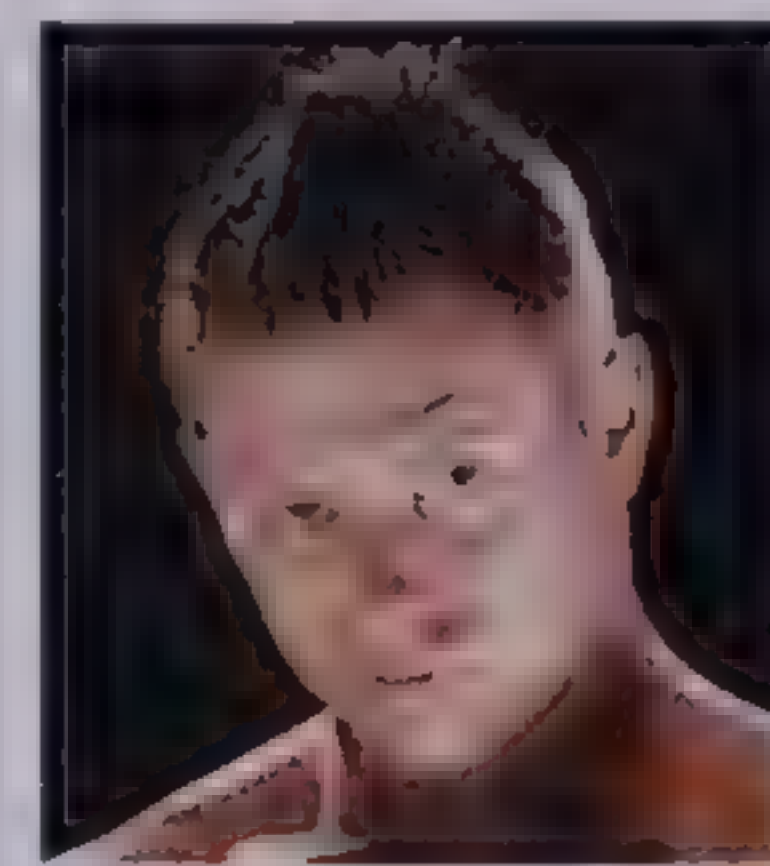
WRESTLEMANIA XXVII
APRIL 3, 2011

Atlanta has long been considered one of history's strongest sport-entertainment hotbeds. In 2011, WWE added to the city's rich legacy when it brought "The Biggest *WrestleMania* Ever" to the Georgia Dome. In doing so, more than \$62 million were infused into the local economy by members of the WWE Universe.

The night's main event saw The Miz successfully defend his WWE Championship against John Cena, but not before Cena was flattened by a Rock Bottom at the hands of the night's host, The Rock. After the match, The Rock also left Miz lying when he nailed him with The People's Elbow.

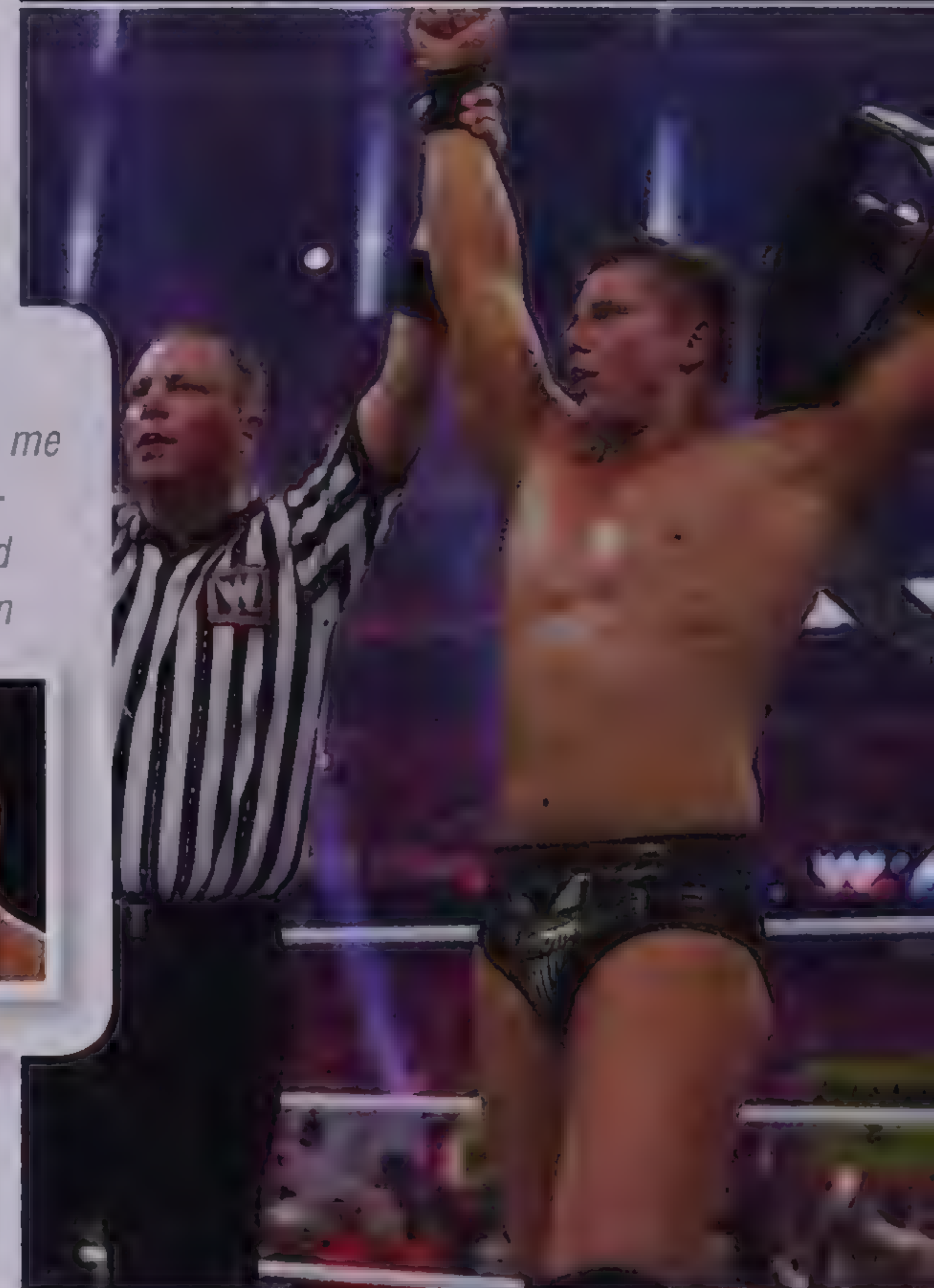
*When I first walked out, they played the most amazing clip you could ever see, and then I got in the ring and there were seven of my best friends sitting front row. They used to watch with me from 1995 to 1999 in high school. They'd always come over every Sunday when there was a pay-per-view, whether it was ECW, WCW, or WWE. They would always sit down in my living room and we would talk about wrestling and watch the pay-per-views. Now those guys were watching me in the main event of *WrestleMania*. We watched Rock and Austin in the main event of *WrestleMania* in my living room, and on this night, they were sitting there in the front row. I looked over at them with the WWE Championship during Cena's entrance and it was the best moment of my career. I said, 'We did it.' And it was one of those moments where we all had goose bumps.*

— The Miz



WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

► The Miz (c) defeated John Cena



► Kane, Big Show, Santino Marella, and Kofi Kingston defeated The Corre

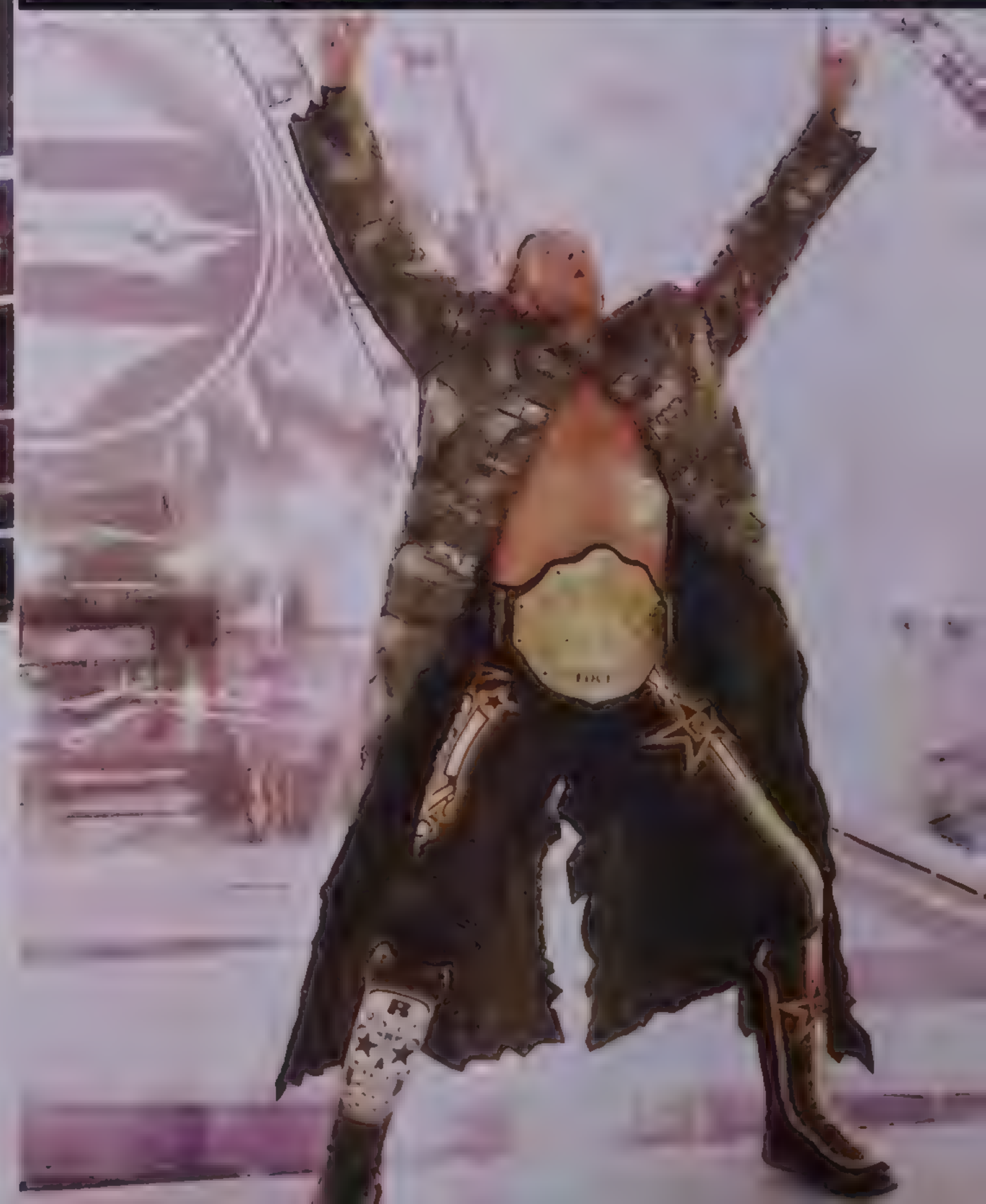


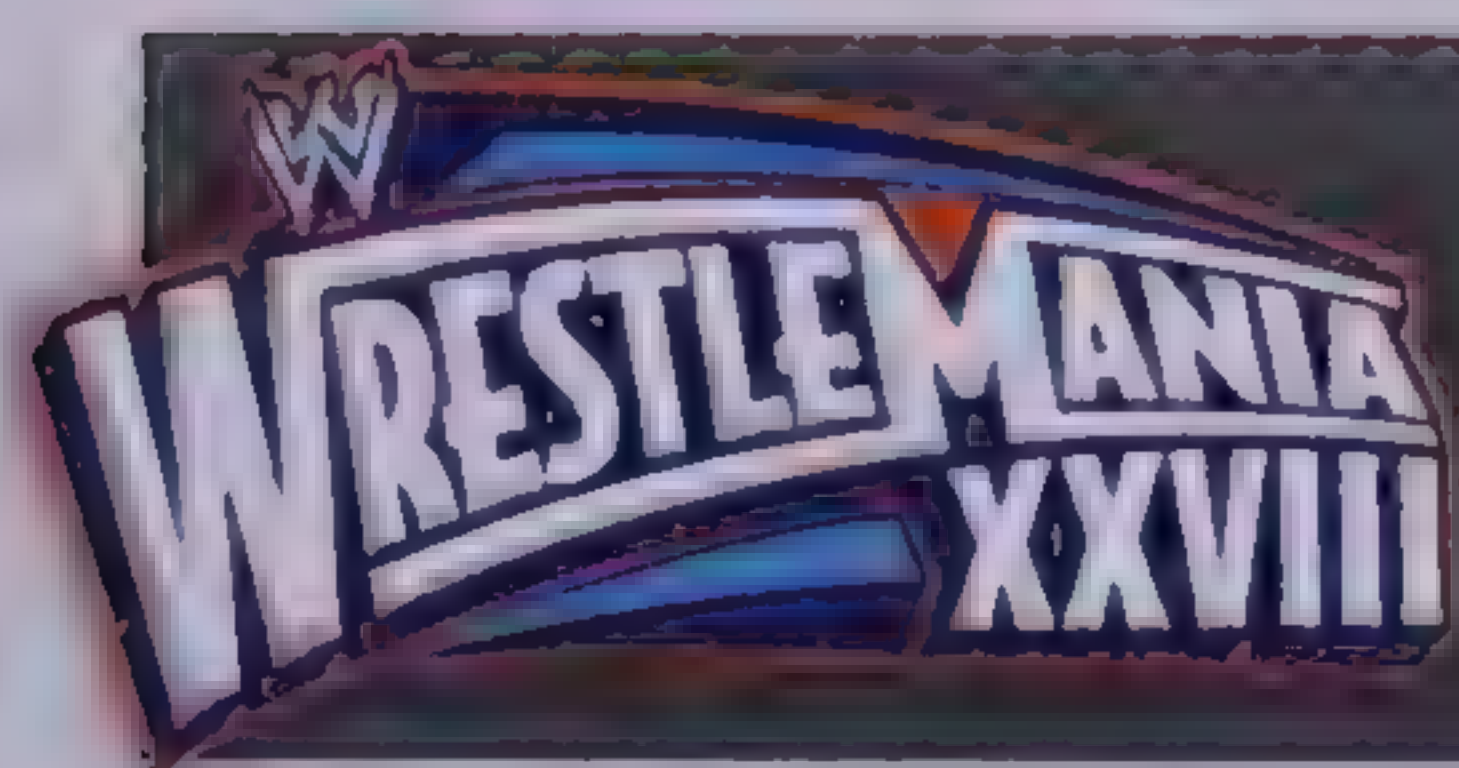
OTHER MATCHES:

- Cody Rhodes defeated Rey Mysterio
- Randy Orton defeated CM Punk
- Michael Cole defeated Jerry Lawler by DQ
- Undertaker defeated Triple H
- John Morrison, Trish Stratus, and Snooki defeated Dolph Ziggler and LayCool

WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP:

► Edge (c) defeated Alberto Del Rio





Venue: Sun Life Stadium – Miami, FL

Attendance: 78,363

WRESTLEMANIA XXVIII

APRIL 1, 2017

► The Rock defeated John Cena



With more than 1.2 million pay-per-view buys to its credit, *WrestleMania XXVIII* is recognized as the most-purchased sports-entertainment event ever. The card featured Undertaker defeating Triple H in a ferocious Hell in a Cell Match to extend his *WrestleMania* undefeated streak to 20-0. Also, in what was dubbed a “Once in a Lifetime” encounter, The Rock returned to *WrestleMania* action for the first time since *WrestleMania XX* when he beat John Cena in an epic dream match between two of WWE’s most legendary names.

Rock vs. Cena compared to Rock vs. Hogan is essentially the same thing. It's weird because when you look back on it from a very outside-looking-in perspective, I think people were swept up in the nostalgia factor of Hogan. It was essentially the same with The Rock, a megastar that came back. And it was built for a full year, so I think people were more excited to see the guy they only had one shot of seeing rather than the guy you see every day. It was a wonderful moment and hopefully it'll be remembered as just as large as Rock-Hogan.

— John Cena



INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP: ► Big Show defeated Cody Rhodes (c)

HELL IN A CELL WITH GUEST REFEREE, SHAWN MICHAELS:

► Undertaker defeated Triple H

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP: ► CM Punk (c) defeated Chris Jericho

OTHER MATCHES:

► Kane defeated Randy Orton

► Kelly Kelly and Maria Menounos defeated Eve and Beth Phoenix

► Team Johnny defeated Team Teddy

WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP:

► Sheamus defeated Daniel Bryan (c)





Venue: MetLife Stadium – East Rutherford, NJ

Attendance: 80,676

More than 80,000 fans from all 50 states and 34 countries converged onto New Jersey's MetLife Stadium to witness the most anticipated rematch in sports-entertainment history: John Cena vs. The Rock. With redemption for his *WrestleMania XXVIII* loss on his mind, Cena topped The Rock with an AA to win the match and the WWE Championship.

Earlier in the evening, CM Punk set out to make history when he attempted to become the first man ever to defeat Undertaker at *WrestleMania*. The Deadman, however, had other plans. Fueled by the memory of his recently-deceased manager, Paul Bearer, Undertaker extended his *WrestleMania* undefeated streak to a nearly unfathomable 21-0 when he defeated Punk with his patented Tombstone.

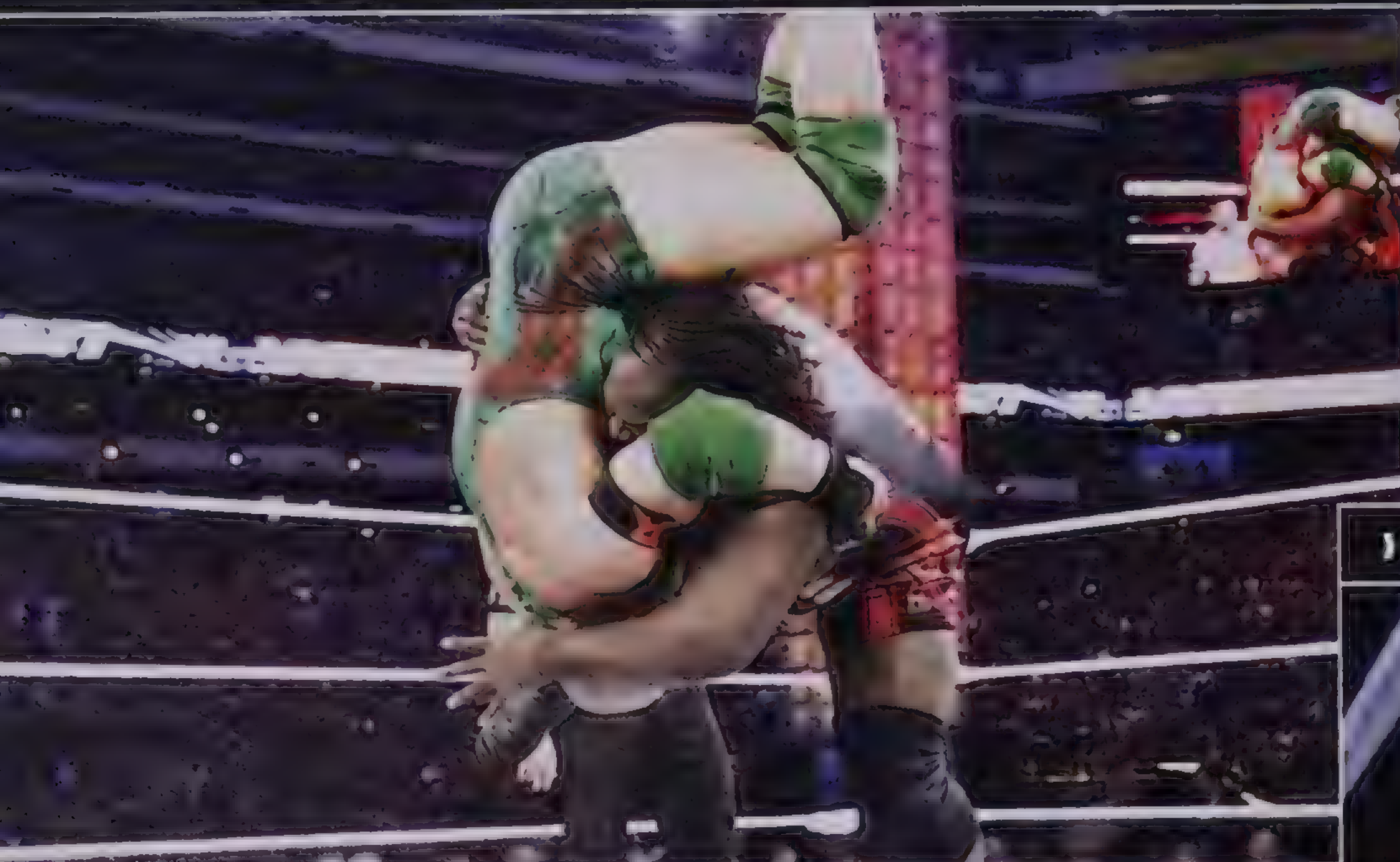
At an excess of \$72 million, *WrestleMania 29* is the highest-grossing event in sports-entertainment history.

WWE CHAMPIONSHIP:

▶ John Cena defeated The Rock (c)



▶ Mark Henry defeated Ryback



▶ Triple H defeated Brock Lesnar



WRESTLEMANIA 29
APRIL 7, 2013

WWE TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP:

» Team Hell No (c) defeated Dolph Ziggler and Big E Langston

WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP:

» Alberto Del Rio defeated Jack Swagger

OTHER MATCHES:

» The Shield defeated Randy Orton, Sheamus, and Big Show

» Fandango defeated Chris Jericho

» Undertaker defeated CM Punk



“ I was halfway through the streak before we even realized there was a streak. And I think it's become part of the continual WrestleMania storyline now. It's 'Who's going to try and beat the streak?' It's the result of a long, hard year of work to get to that point, to get to WrestleMania, to be a part of it, to have a match at WrestleMania. ”

— Undertaker



WRESTLEMANIA XXX
APRIL 6, 2014

Mercedes-Benz Superdome – New Orleans, LA

Attendance: TBD

WWE's biggest celebration of the year heads to “The Big Easy” in April 2014 when New Orleans' Mercedes-Benz Superdome hosts *WrestleMania XXX*.

“ What better place, what better building to celebrate the thirtieth birthday of WrestleMania than the Mercedes-Benz Superdome? The building itself has become a global icon surrounded by a city itself that has also become a global icon because even through the toughest adversity, the city banded together around a building to create a thriving metropolis once again. Often in WWE, you are faced with adversity, but you are so proud of what you do you manage to triumph in the end. WWE runs parallel with this wonderful city of New Orleans. We care greatly about our product, and go to great lengths to say that we are the greatest piece of entertainment in the world. New Orleans citizens are the same. They care so much, so deeply about their city that even in times of ultimate peril, they band together and show the world that there is no better place. ”

— John Cena

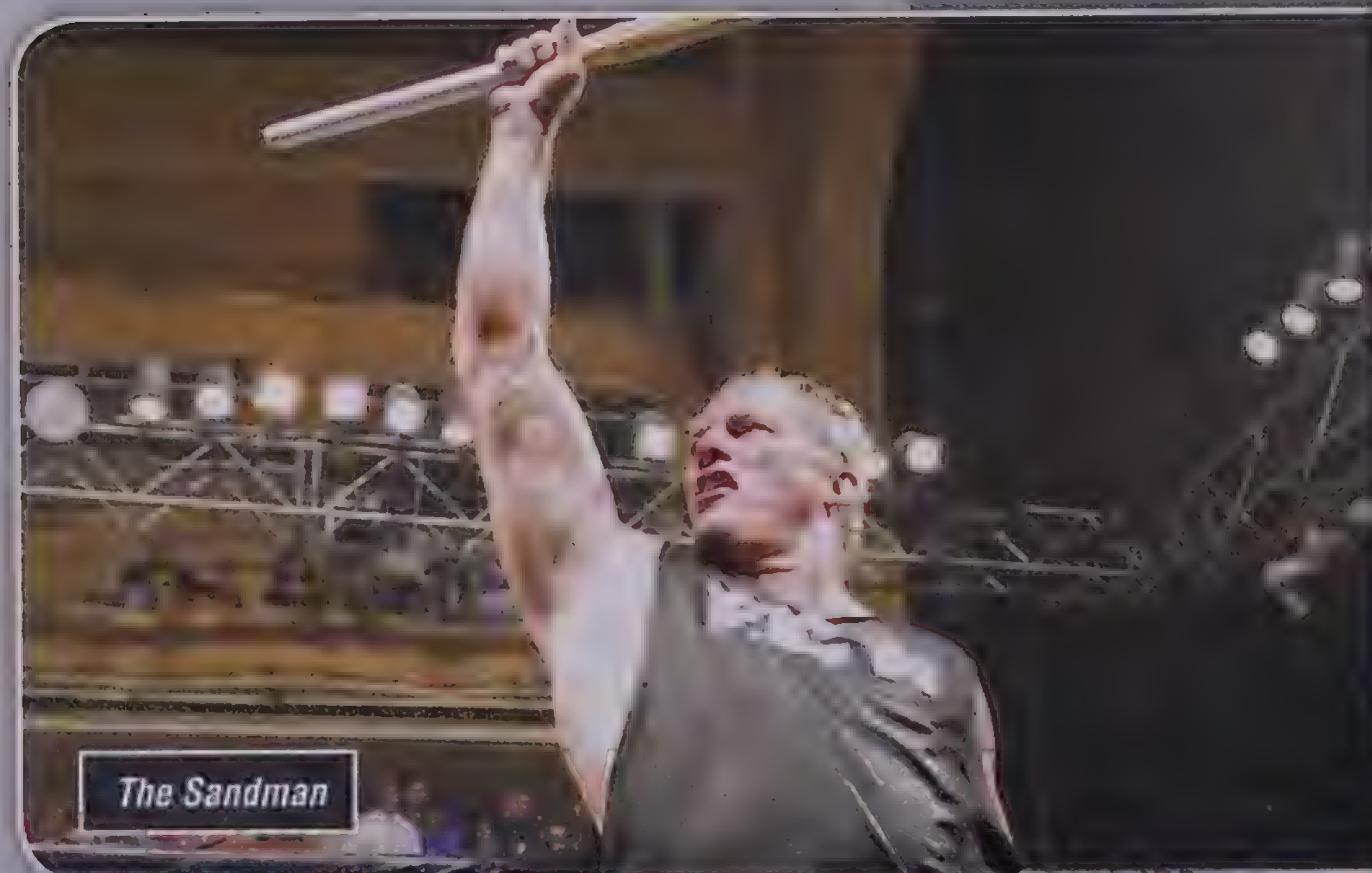


*Lance Storm with Dawn Marie prior to defeating
Chris Jericho in a Singles Match on June 12, 2005*



ECW®

The Sandman



*Bubba Ray Dudley of the Dudley
Boyz grates on Tommy Dreamer
on June 12, 2005*



As ECW marched into its *Guilty As Charged* pay-per-view in January 2001, rumors of the Philadelphia-based promotion's ensuing demise began to surface. In an attempt to thwart the rumors' continued circulation, ECW strategically announced that they'd be back on pay-per-view in March for *Living Dangerously*, but the event never happened. The promotion's financial woes became too much to overcome, resulting in ECW declaring bankruptcy a few months later. Following the announcement, fans of the extreme promotion assumed they'd never see ECW again.

After purchasing the defunct company's rights in 2003, WWE gave ECW fans a reason to celebrate when they released *The Rise and Fall of ECW* on DVD in November 2004. Thirsting to once again consume the unique brand of action they had followed just a few short years prior, ECW's cult-like following responded by purchasing copies of the documentary at a record pace.

"*The Rise and Fall of ECW* DVD became the fastest-selling and, at the time, biggest-selling WWE release in history," recalls Paul Heyman, who was the former creative head of ECW and now is an important part of WWE. "The volume of business coupled with the passion of the audience took almost everyone in WWE by surprise."



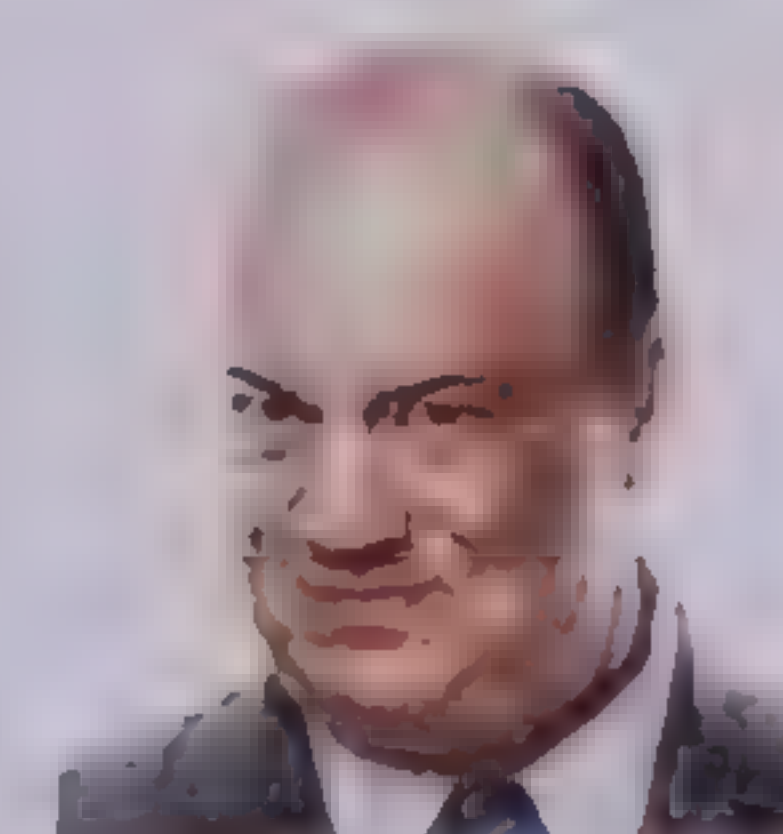
Sabu defeats Rhyno in a Singles Match on One Night Stand on June 12, 2005

On the heels of the DVD's success, WWE began to investigate additional avenues of distribution for its popular new asset. It was ultimately decided that WWE would produce a one-time ECW-themed pay-per-view in June 2005. Billed as *ECW One Night Stand*, the event emanated from New York City's Hammerstein Ballroom and prominently featured many of the names that helped make ECW so unique, including Sabu, Tommy Dreamer, and The Sandman.

Like the DVD, *ECW One Night Stand* was a creative and financial success. But despite the event being so well received, there were no immediate plans for a follow-up event. "As far as WWE was concerned, ECW was monetized, capitalized on, and a thing of the past," says Heyman.

Rob Van Dam was actually the person who came to me and then to Vince and laid the pitch regarding a one-night-only reunion, but only under the condition that it would have to be an authentic ECW presentation, not the WWE interpretation of Extreme Championship Wrestling.

— Paul Heyman



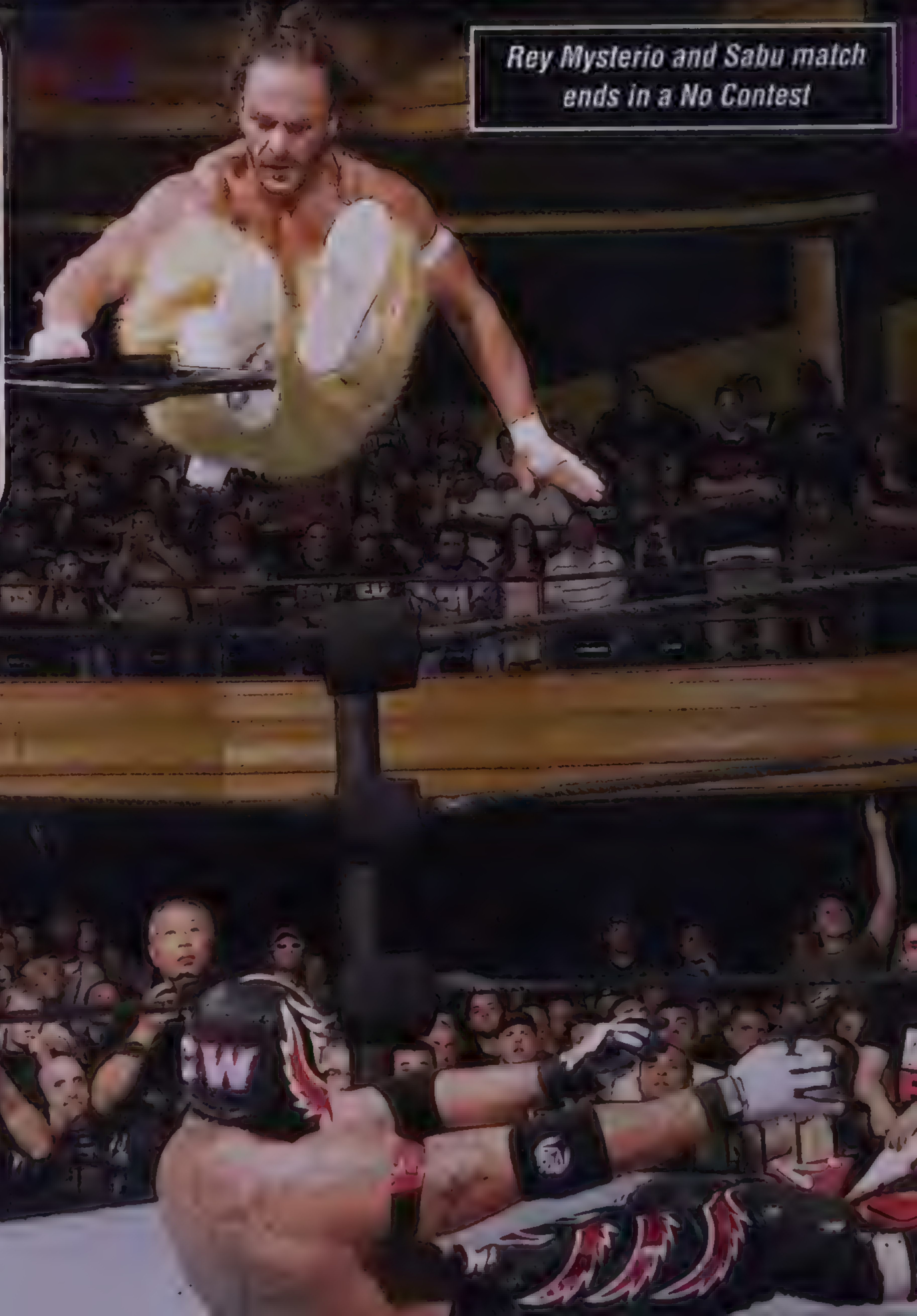
But when impressive DVD sales reports for *One Night Stand* began to pour in, it became clear that sports-entertainment fans wanted more ECW. That's when Shane McMahon began to spearhead an internal push to re-launch ECW. Initially, the plan was for ECW to be distributed exclusively online and to operate as a standalone brand separate from WWE and its already-established production resources.

"But as interest from license holders and networks and other forms of ancillary revenue streams increased, Vince got more and more involved and wanted to blow it up as much as possible," recalls Heyman. "The moment SyFy was willing to pay a license fee for this program, I knew we had to adhere to certain philosophies that would negate the effectiveness of telling people that we are the alternative to WWE."

The Dudley Boyz defeat Tommy Dreamer and Sandman in a Tag Team Match on June 12, 2005

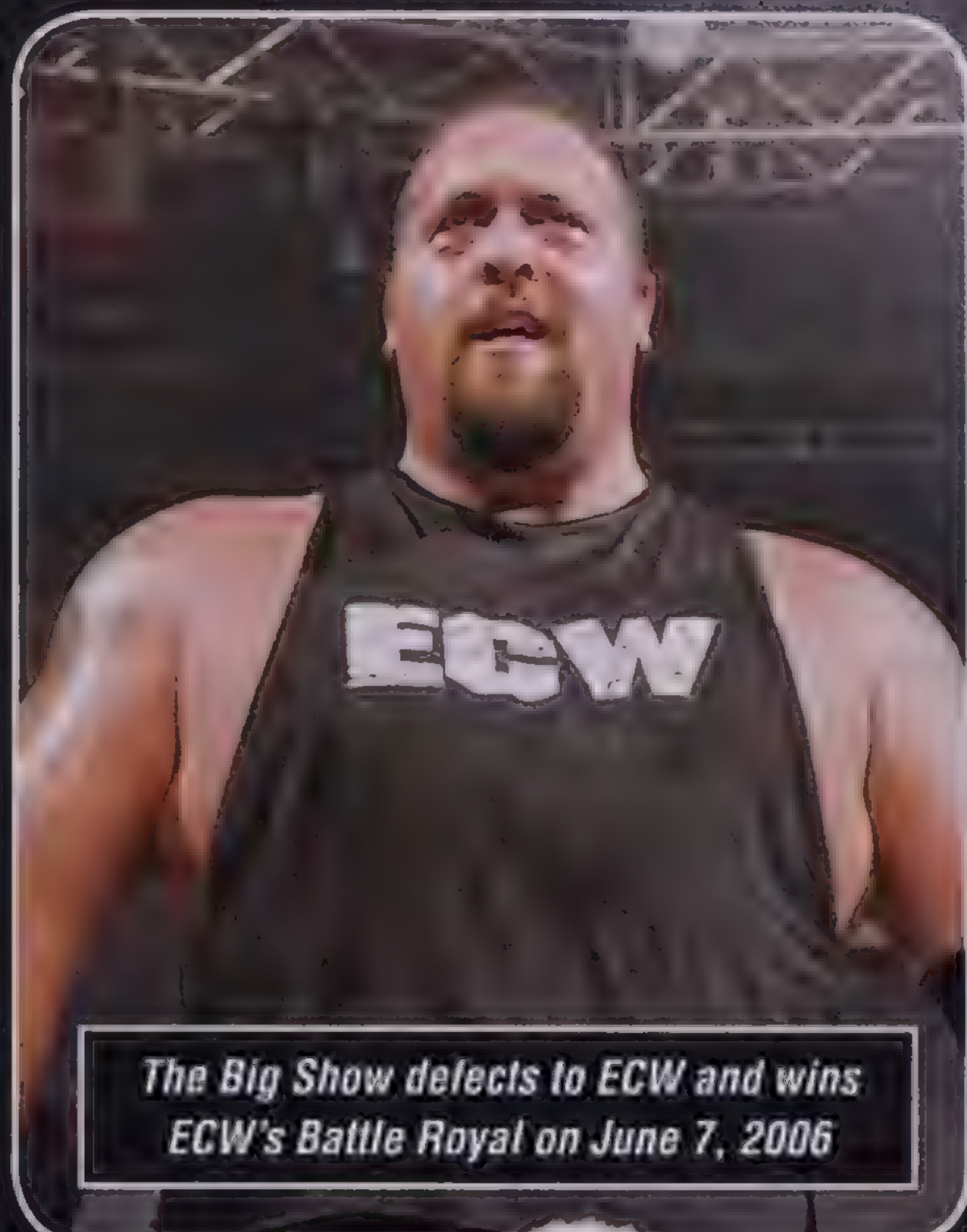


Rey Mysterio and Sabu match ends in a No Contest



With a network deal for ECW in place, WWE moved forward on launching its third brand, starting with another *One Night Stand* pay-per-view in June 2006. And as Heyman feared, the brand began to show signs of becoming sanitized. Not only did *One Night Stand* include WWE talent, such as Randy Orton, Edge, and John Cena, but it also featured an Extreme Rules Match that ended prematurely.

"What really stood out was the World Heavyweight Championship Match between Rey Mysterio and Sabu," says Joey Styles, a former ECW commentator who now oversees content for WWE.com and WWE's social media. "It ended in a No Contest when both of them went through a table. That's not ECW. That would never happen in ECW, unless you fell off the top of the Hammerstein Ballroom, through the table, on the concrete."



The Big Show defects to ECW and wins ECW's Battle Royal on June 7, 2006



Mick Foley unleashes "Barbie" at Extreme Rules 2006



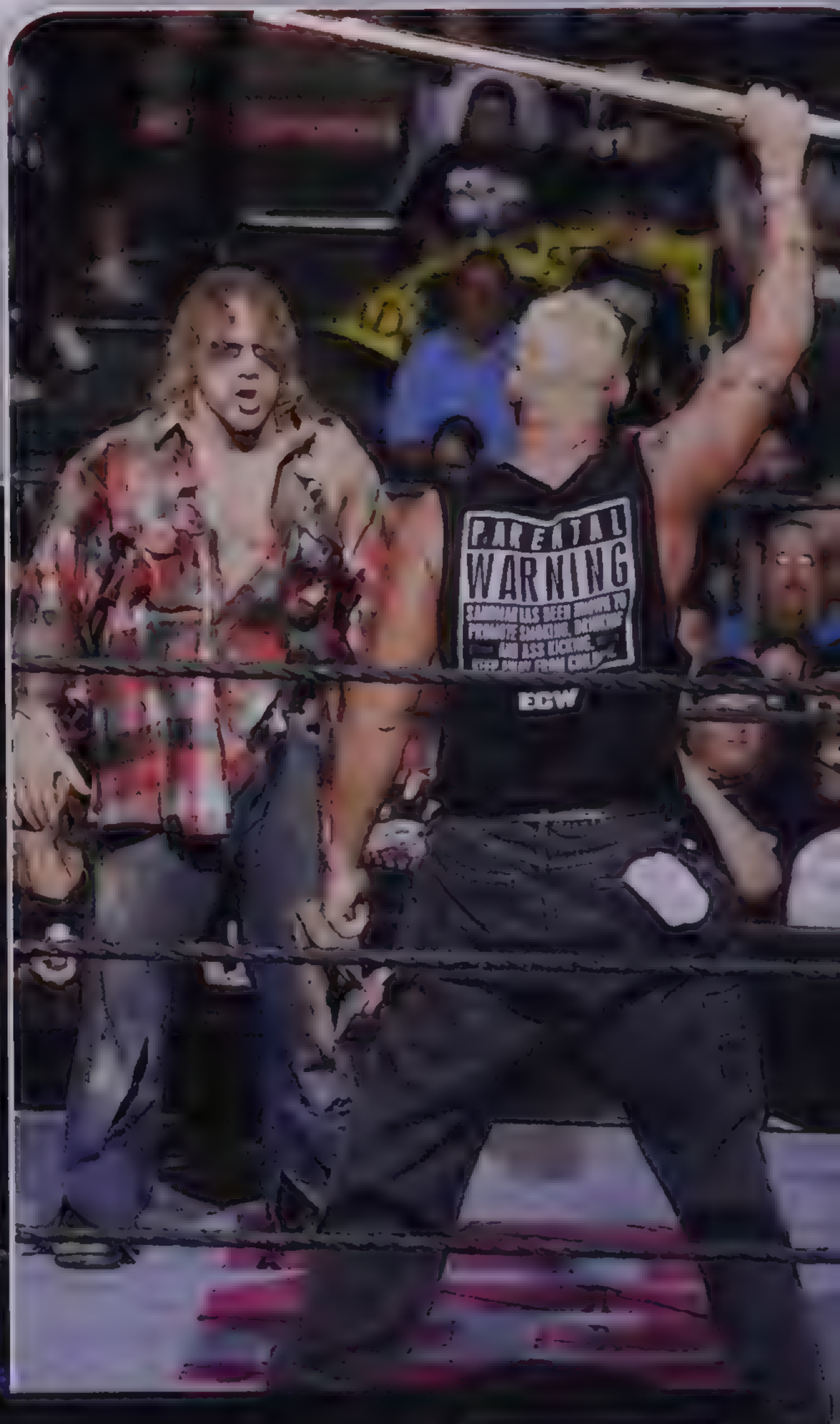
ECW ON SYFY

ECW began its weekly episodic Syfy run on June 13, 2006. To help separate itself from WWE, the third brand labeled its competitors as Extremists and Vixens, as opposed to Superstars and Divas. Additional production variances included new camera angles and a considerably smaller entranceway than the one used for *Raw* and *SmackDown*.

The first episode registered an impressive 2.79 rating, with 3.4 million viewers tuning in to witness Heyman crown Rob Van Dam the new ECW Champion, Kelly Kelly perform a striptease, Sabu win an Extreme Battle Royal, and The Sandman have the dubious distinction of squaring off against The Zombie in the series' first-ever match.

But the original plan did not call for Sandman battling a zombie. Instead, the show was to kick off with an alien wearing a shirt that read, "Welcome to Syfy, we're about to change the presentation of ECW." It was meant to be a parody and a nod to longtime Syfy viewers. But WWE later pulled the idea after learning that Syfy already had a show with an alien, and that having Sandman decimate an alien on-air might not be in the spirit of good partnership.

"So Vince asked for suggestions of alternative characters," remembers Heyman. "Once we came up with The Zombie, the idea was going to be the same. But Vince thought the longer the character went on with the interview and the longer we presented this as where we were taking the brand, the better it would be. Vince and I agreed to disagree on that particular facet of the presentation."



“As Sandman kept carling The Zombia, I start grunting like a zombie. That's when Vince screamed in my headset, Alright, knock that [expletive] off already.”

—Joey Styles



Heyman awards the ECW Title to Rob Van Dam on June 13, 2006, making RVD the first Superstar to hold the WWE and ECW Championships simultaneously





Big Show wins the ECW Championship on July 4, 2006

Just weeks after ECW launched on SyFy, its champion, RVD, was charged with drug possession and subsequently suspended by WWE, but not before losing his ECW Championship to Big Show. The end of RVD's ECW Title reign marked one of the final times an ECW Original would hold the title, as more WWE names began to be infused into the brand.

When ECW returned to the Hammerstein Ballroom in August 2006, the brand had already begun the transition from its original manifestation, as only 30 percent of the night's competitors were ECW Originals. And the main event, which essentially featured two WWE names, saw Big Show defend the ECW Championship against Batista in a match that was negatively received by the live crowd.

"I don't think that Big Show versus Batista was designed to fail," says Heyman. "The audience at the Hammerstein Ballroom was so pissed off at the time that match came out that Big Show and Batista never had a chance to succeed no matter what they did. The Hammerstein audience had seen such a non-authentic version of the product they were hoping to get that by the time that title match got into the ring, the audience was furious."

DECEMBER TO DISMEMBER

After witnessing the crowd reaction CM Punk received as a member of Team DX at *Survivor Series* 2006, Heyman hoped to anoint the young Superstar as the new face of ECW, starting as early as ECW's first pay-per-view, *December to Dismember*. Vince McMahon, however, had other plans.

"If there was any doubt that Paul did not have autonomy at that time, Vince made it very clear that Bobby Lashley was going to be the face of ECW," recalls Styles. "Not because he was a good wrestler, and not because he had any charisma, but because he had a good physique, which is a formula that has worked in professional wrestling since the 1980s. I don't necessarily think it works that well anymore."

Historically, *December to Dismember* does not sit atop WWE's list of greatest pay-per-views. Not only did it end considerably earlier than most WWE pay-per-views, but the live event only managed to fill approximately half of the James Brown Arena in Augusta, Georgia, and pay-per-view buys totaled less than 100,000. By night's end, ECW Originals Tommy Dreamer and Stevie Richards both requested their releases, which they were not granted, and Heyman, who was relieved of his duties hours later, could be seen weeping backstage.



Bobby Lashley defeats Big Show, Rob Van Dam, Hardcore Holly, CM Punk, and Test for the ECW World Championship

“ Why was *December to Dismember* so poorly received?

Because the show sucked. ”

—Paul Heyman



“Vince and I had reached a breaking point,” says Heyman. “Our communication was toxic. It was time for us to take a rest from each other. The process was broken and the hostility between the two of us was unhealthy. Vince needed to work with other people. And I needed to go home.”



Matt and Jeff Hardy defeat MNM with Melina



Kevin Thorn and Ariel defeat Mike Knox and Kelly Kelly

A NEW ECW ERA

With Paul Heyman out of the picture, ECW began to morph into a brand that helped give young Superstars valuable national television exposure that they might not have otherwise received on *Raw* or *SmackDown*. Among the most noteworthy names to benefit from ECW's new direction were CM Punk and the newly-christened John Morrison. The two Superstars engaged in a months-long rivalry over the ECW Title beginning at the June 2007 *Night of Champions* pay-per-view when Morrison filled in for **Chris Benoit**, who was originally scheduled to compete.



By 2009, a Superstar Initiative had made the brand almost completely unrecognizable from its original form. Gone were the Originals (sans Tommy Dreamer), and in their place were several up-and-comers aiming to perfect their characters. Many of these fresh new faces never panned out, but a few such as Evan Bourne, Zack Ryder, and most notably Sheamus, forged a longer lasting impact with WWE. Though it was a serviceable proving ground, it was no longer ECW, which made the brand expendable.

Finally, in February 2010, Vince McMahon announced that ECW would be going off the air, marking the end of the promotion's nearly 20-year run.

CHRIS BENOIT

After Chris Benoit failed to appear at *Night of Champions*, WWE contacted the Fayetteville County Sheriff's office requesting they check on the Benoit family. Upon arrival on June 25, 2007, authorities discovered the tragic double homicide-suicide scene involving Benoit, his wife Nancy, and his son, Daniel.

"When I heard about Benoit, I freaked out. It was horrible, absolutely horrible. You have no idea how much I cried. I couldn't believe it. He was a guy who loved the business so much. And I enjoyed watching him in the ring. But sometimes we don't know what's going on in their lives at home. We only know them on the road. We know they're good guys, fun to be with, and fun to travel with. But we don't know their private lives most of the time. We don't know how they live," recalls Pat Patterson.



WWE TODAY

OUTSIDE THE RING

HEADQUARTERS



Inside her office at WWE Headquarters, Stephanie McMahon strategizes WWE's top line initiatives with key staff members

The 1980s marked a period of rapid growth for WWE. One year after Vince and Linda McMahon purchased the company in 1982, WWE and its 13 employees moved from Cape Cod, Massachusetts to Greenwich, Connecticut, where they initially occupied one floor of a modest office building. Not long after the move, the company took over a second floor before eventually outgrowing the Greenwich location completely.

"We were growing so fast," recalls Linda McMahon. "We bought another building in Greenwich at 5 Edgewood Avenue, but we never moved into it. We outgrew it before we could ever get in."

WWE then moved seven miles north to an office on Summer Street in Stamford, Connecticut. In keeping with the ongoing theme, the growing company didn't stay on Summer Street long before becoming too big for the location. In 1990, WWE finally moved to their current corporate headquarters on East Main Street in Stamford. The considerably larger locale features four floors of office space, a spacious cafeteria, complete gym, and rooftop terrace.



East Main Street has been the site of WWE's global headquarters since 1990. WWE headquarters is easily identifiable to commuters traveling on I-95 in southern Connecticut.



The WWE gym is a great perk for employees and Superstars. It's not uncommon to see John Cena, Randy Orton, or any other Superstar training here when WWE live events pass through the Northeast.



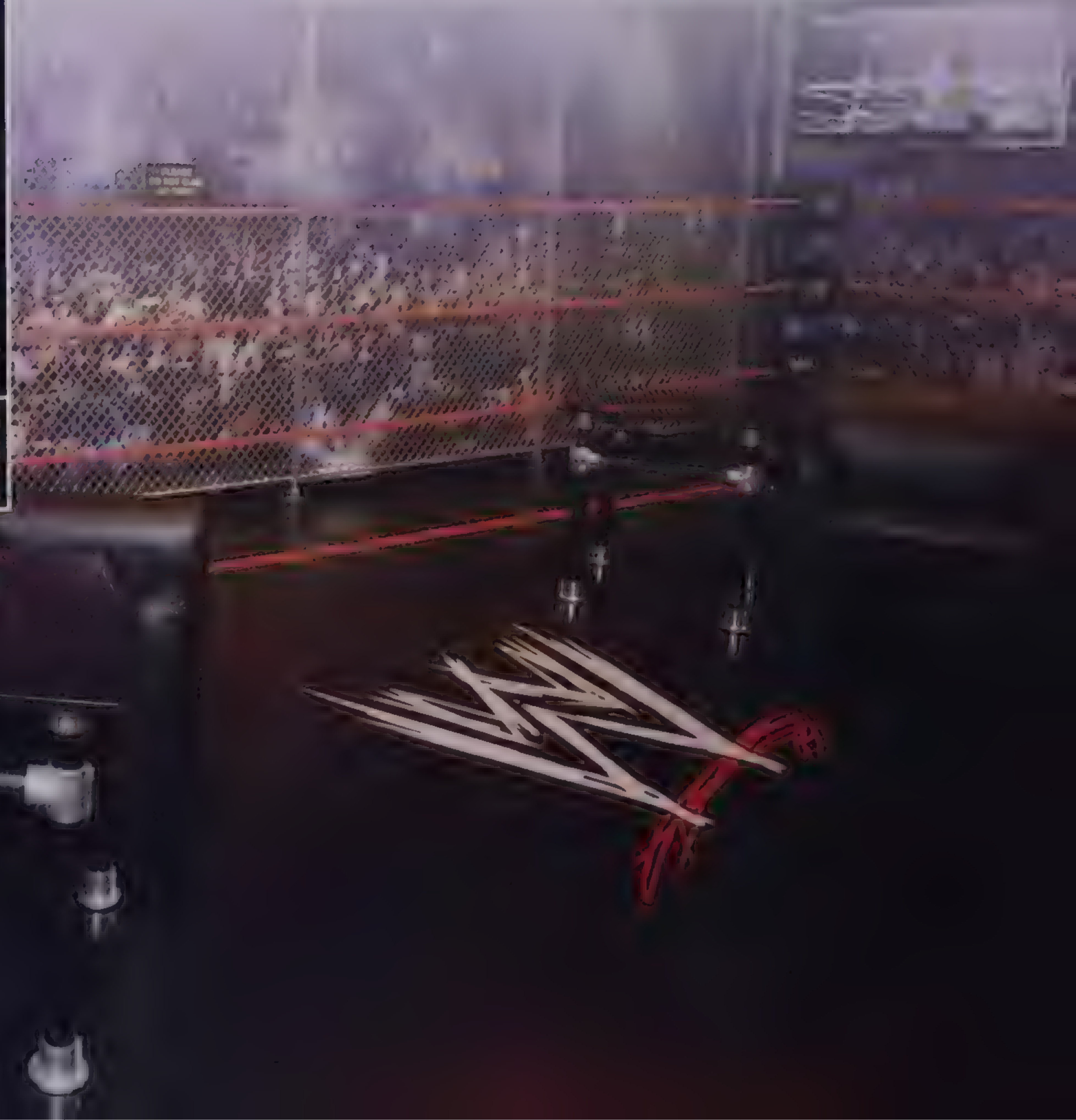


When getting off the elevator, employees experience what it feels like to walk down the ramp and into the ring



The WWE, World Heavyweight, and Divas Champions are always represented as "duratrans" in one of the hallways

A steel cage surrounds one of the internal lobby areas found inside WWE headquarters.





Monitors and tablets grace the walls leading to WWE.com

A banner featuring the upcoming pay-per-view always hangs from the ceiling of WWE's main lobby. A life-sized statue of Andre the Giant is also featured in the lobby, as well as an exhibit that allows invited guests to compare hand sizes with the Eighth Wonder of the World.



Employees can use touchscreen monitors to browse WWE.com while waiting for an elevator



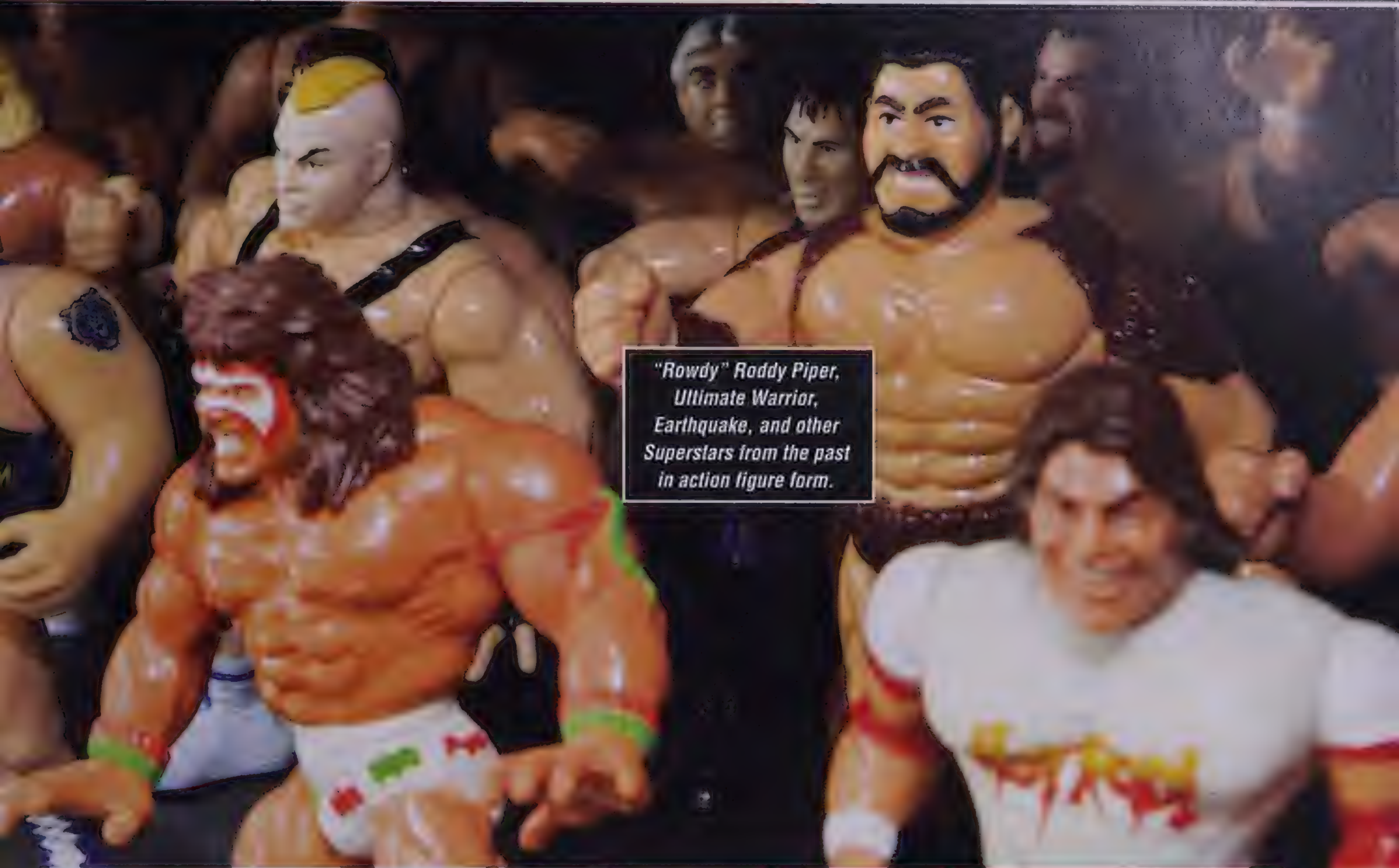


Decades of WWE merchandise adorn the shelves of one WWE employee's office



Images of Ryback, Alberto Del Rio, CM Punk, and other WWE Superstars overlook employees enjoying lunch in the cafeteria





*"Rowdy" Roddy Piper,
Ultimate Warrior,
Earthquake, and other
Superstars from the past
in action figure form.*



WWE employees often retreat to the terrace for a relaxing lunch break.

Fifty years ago, WWE was simply a regional wrestling promotion, whose touch only extended to a handful of northeastern states. Today, WWE has grown into a media giant with programming that reaches more than 650 million homes in more than 150 countries in 30 languages. And with each passing day, its larger-than-life Superstars are attracting even more fans, thanks in large part to WWE's commitment to creating compelling family-friendly entertainment across multiple mediums.

We give the audience what they want in a far more sophisticated way than we have in the past.

— Vince McMahon



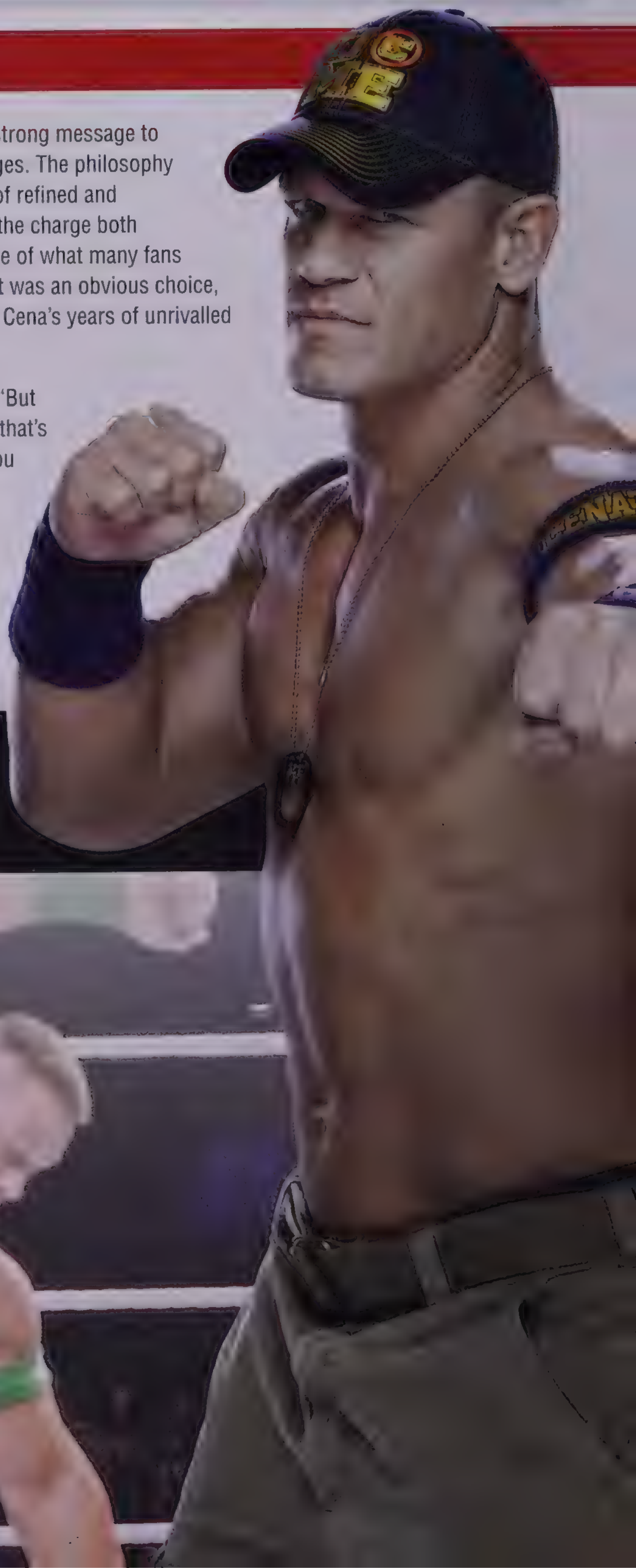
PARTNERSHIPS

When WWE's weekly television content shifted to TV-PG in 2008, the company sent a strong message to parents that it was committed to delivering quality entertainment to fans of nearly all ages. The philosophy change eliminated much of the Attitude Era's excess, while also ushering in a new era of refined and compelling storytelling based around WWE's magnetic Superstars and Divas. Leading the charge both behind and in front of the camera is John Cena, who has become recognized as the face of what many fans refer to as the "PG Era." For WWE, tapping Cena as the company's ultimate protagonist was an obvious choice, considering his charisma, reliability, and unmatched work ethic. For the fans, however, Cena's years of unrivalled success have made him the most polarizing Superstar in sports-entertainment history.

"The vast majority of the audience obviously loves John Cena," says Vince McMahon. "But there is that minority, a vocal minority, and I think they're just messing with John, and that's fine. John likes that, and personally I do too. That's what makes the WWE what it is. You can cheer for anyone you wish, you can boo for anyone you wish. Quite frankly, when you have someone like Cena, who, as we say in the business, is '**over**' so much, it's going to make some people say, 'Eh, you know what? I'm not going to cheer for this guy. I'm going to try to boo him out of the building.' And that's okay. You paid your money, you're watching on television, you're not dictated to under any sort of circumstances. Boo who you choose. John Cena thrives on that. He's always been a bit controversial, and he always will be only because he's John Cena."

DID YOU KNOW?

"Over" is an adjective insiders use to describe a Superstar's popularity with a targeted audience.



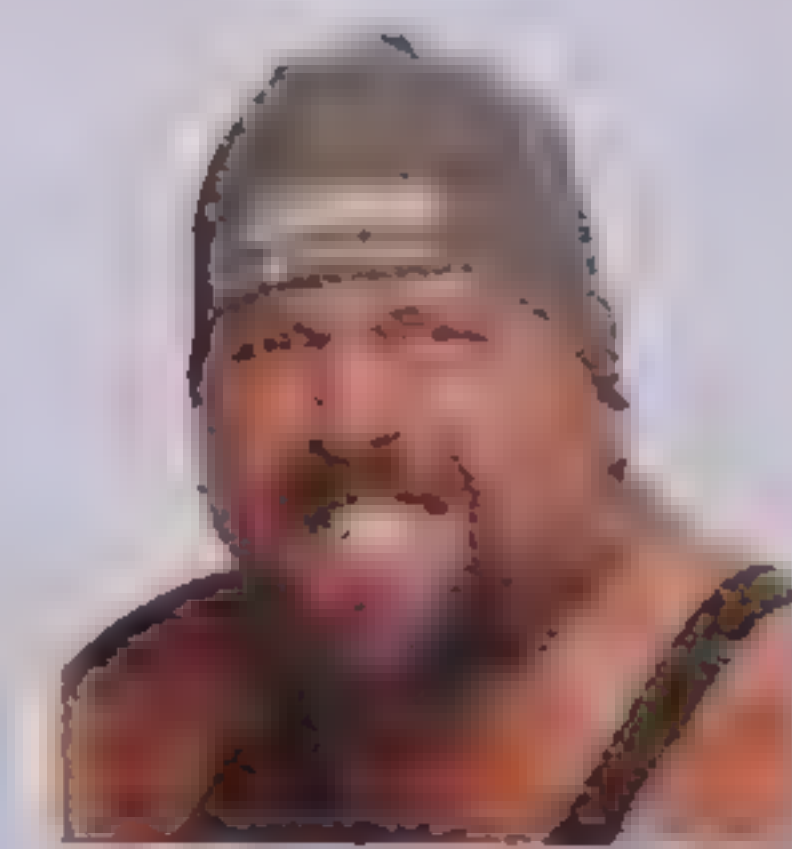
With Cena as its top star and a new reputation as responsible programmers, WWE soon found itself as an in-demand brand with which other companies were eager to form partnerships.

"Our PG rating has been extremely important to changing perceptions," says Michelle Wilson, Chief Marketing Officer. "The biggest thing that we're up against is perceptions of who we were years ago when the content was edgier. At the time, the content was very relevant, but not necessarily what we want our content to be today."

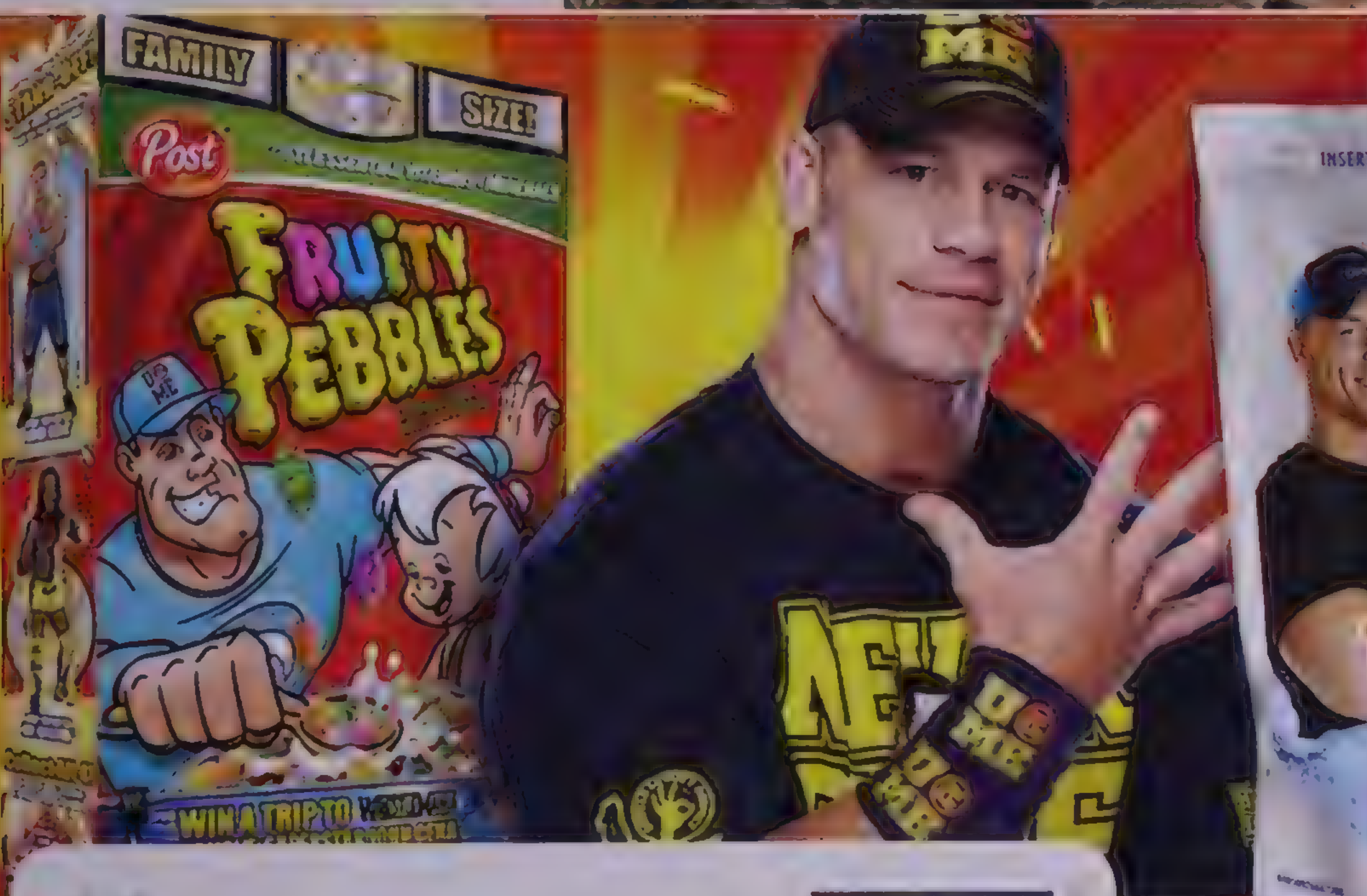
Post Foods, General Motors, Got Milk, Mars, Pepsi, Frito-Lay, and Bank of America are just a handful of the blue-chip brands that became attracted to the new-look WWE. These new partnerships not only benefit WWE from the obvious direct bottom line standpoint, but also helped further the mainstream presence of many of its Superstars.

I've seen Cena's calendar. He's doing something 29 out of 31 days. That's a real credit to the kind of guy he is and the work ethic he has. Whether you like him or not, you're not going to outwork him. This kid doesn't know surrender or quit. That's not just a slogan for his T-shirt. He can run eight weeks in a row, not go home, and still outwork everyone around him with a smile on his face.

— Big Show



WWE partners with Slim Jim™ to support our troops



In 2013 alone, Cena replaced Fred Flintstone on more than eight million boxes of Fruity Pebbles and Cocoa Pebbles, appeared on Capri Sun packaging, and inspired Kmart's children's apparel line, "Never Give Up by John Cena." Post Foods' plan to partner with WWE was set in motion after The Rock poked fun at John Cena in 2011 for wearing a variety of colorful T-shirts, telling him, "You run around here looking like a big, fat bowl of Fruity Pebbles."

Other Superstars attracting major brands include Mark Henry (Doritos), The Miz (7-Eleven), Brodus Clay (Hot Pockets), and Big Show (Slim Jim), among others.

We needed to be more mainstream, and the best way to do that was to be PG.

— Michelle D. Wilson,
Chief Marketing Officer, WWE



WWE'S COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL ISSUES

Beyond delivering responsible television content, WWE is also committed to leveraging the power of its brand to help address important social issues, including diversity and inclusion, education, military support, and providing hope to those in need. In recent years, fans have learned of WWE's commitment to community and family through references made on the company's various platforms, including television and the Internet. But just because WWE is now alerting fans of its efforts in this area doesn't mean it's a new venture. In fact, WWE has been tackling worldwide social issues for decades.

"In the past, Vince was hesitant to talk about it, thinking we wouldn't get a fair shake in the media," reveals Wilson. "I said, 'Why wouldn't we talk about it?' It's such a great opportunity for us to make an impact on social issues; of course, we would want to give that platform to our partners."

DARREN YOUNG

In August 2013, WWE Superstar Darren Young became the first openly gay WWE Superstar when he revealed his sexuality to a TMZ reporter at Los Angeles International Airport.

"All the support that I've got from my WWE family, the WWE Superstars, and my family has been incredible," Young said on a September 2013 episode of *Ellen*.



*Kofi Kingston and R-Truth visit
Children's Hospital of Los Angeles*



Sgt. Slaughter and Big Show with fans at the Special Olympics



WWE's extensive community efforts are made up of four distinct pillars: Diversity, Education, Hope, and Military. Under Diversity, WWE has partnered with The Creative Coalition to create the "Be a STAR" (Show Tolerance and Respect) anti-bullying program with the goal of breaking down prejudices and promoting a culture of fairness and respect, regardless of age, race, religion, sexual orientation, or physical ability. Other partners helping WWE in its Diversity efforts include Stand for the Silent, The Advertising Council, and GLAAD, among others.



With the hope of championing literacy issues, WWE's Education pillar is inspiring new generations to better themselves and the world around them through such programs as the *WrestleMania* Reading Challenge and *SummerSlam* Reading Jam. Each event features a variety of WWE Superstars educating children on the importance of reading.



Through its commitment to Hope, WWE shares its strength with young fans battling life-threatening illnesses by uniting them with their favorite WWE Superstars. By leveraging its longstanding partnership with Make-A-Wish, WWE and its Superstars have granted approximately 4,000 wishes over the past 25 years. John Cena alone has granted nearly 400 wishes, making him the most prolific wish-granter in history. Other organizations helping WWE bring Hope include Susan G. Komen, the Muscular Dystrophy Association, and The Rainbow Connection.



When you see these kids who have these life threatening challenges, I dare say our talent gets more out of it than they do only because it's so personal. And to be able to put a smile on someone's face that otherwise would not be smiling is one of the most extraordinary experiences in your life.

— Vince McMahon

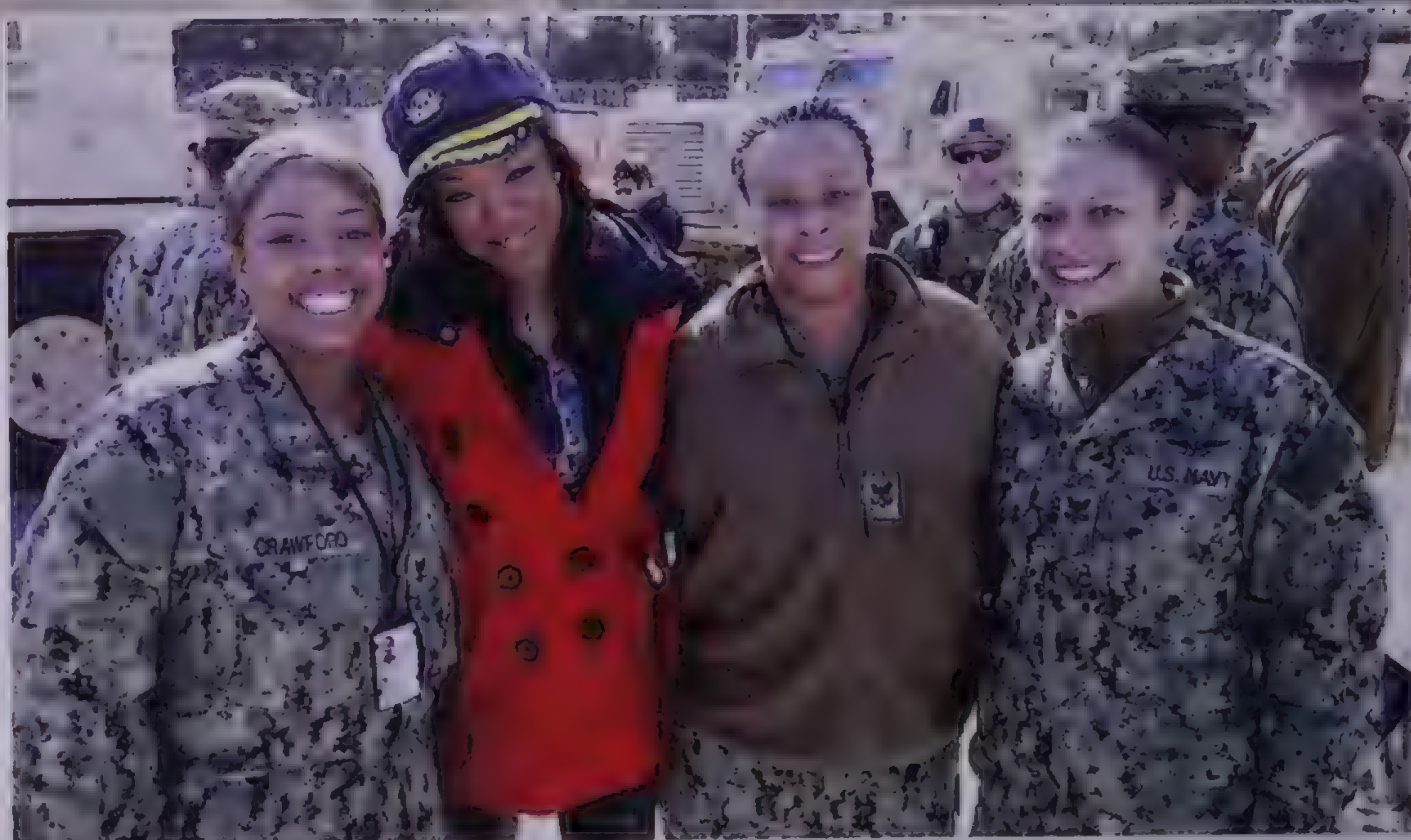
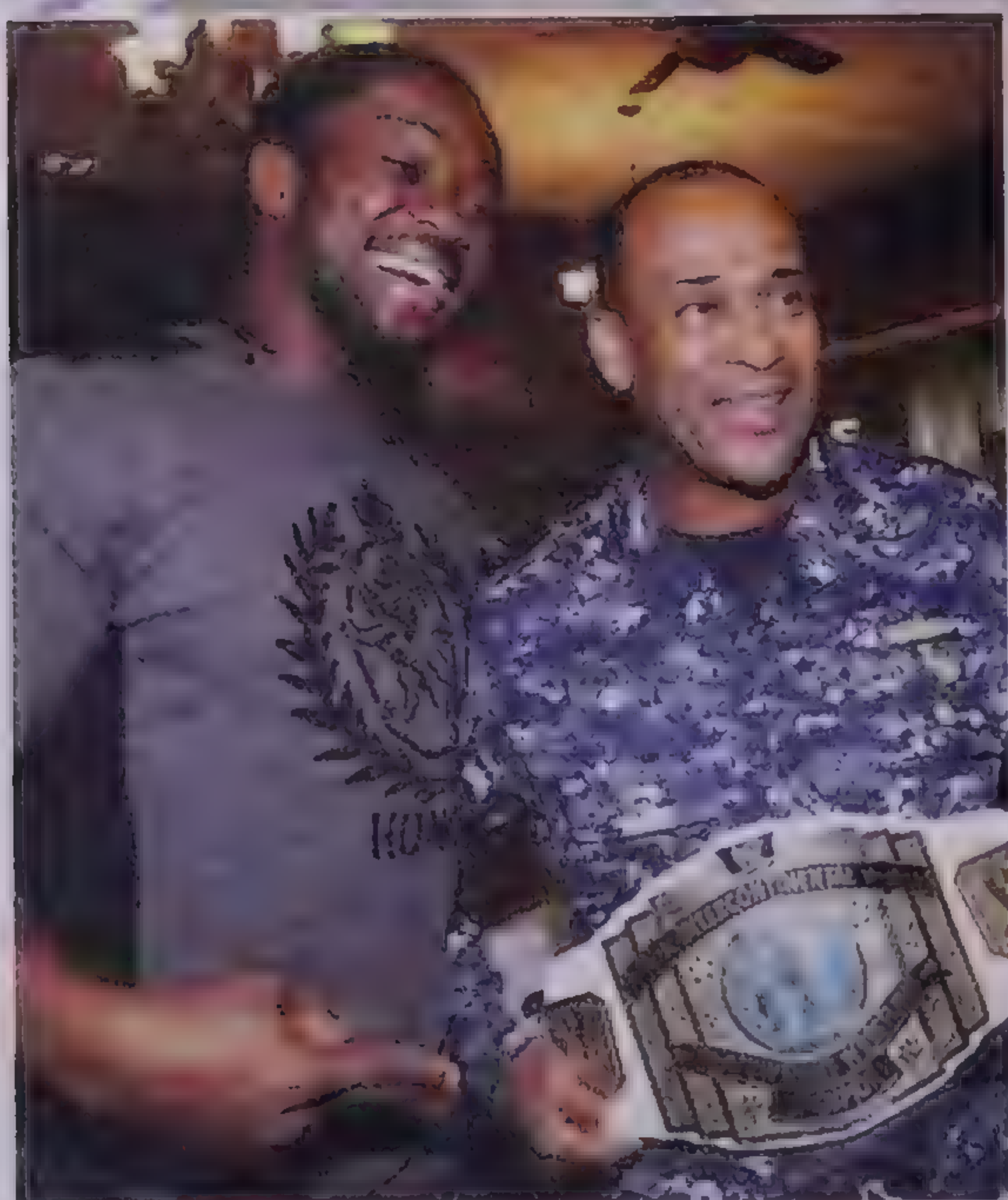
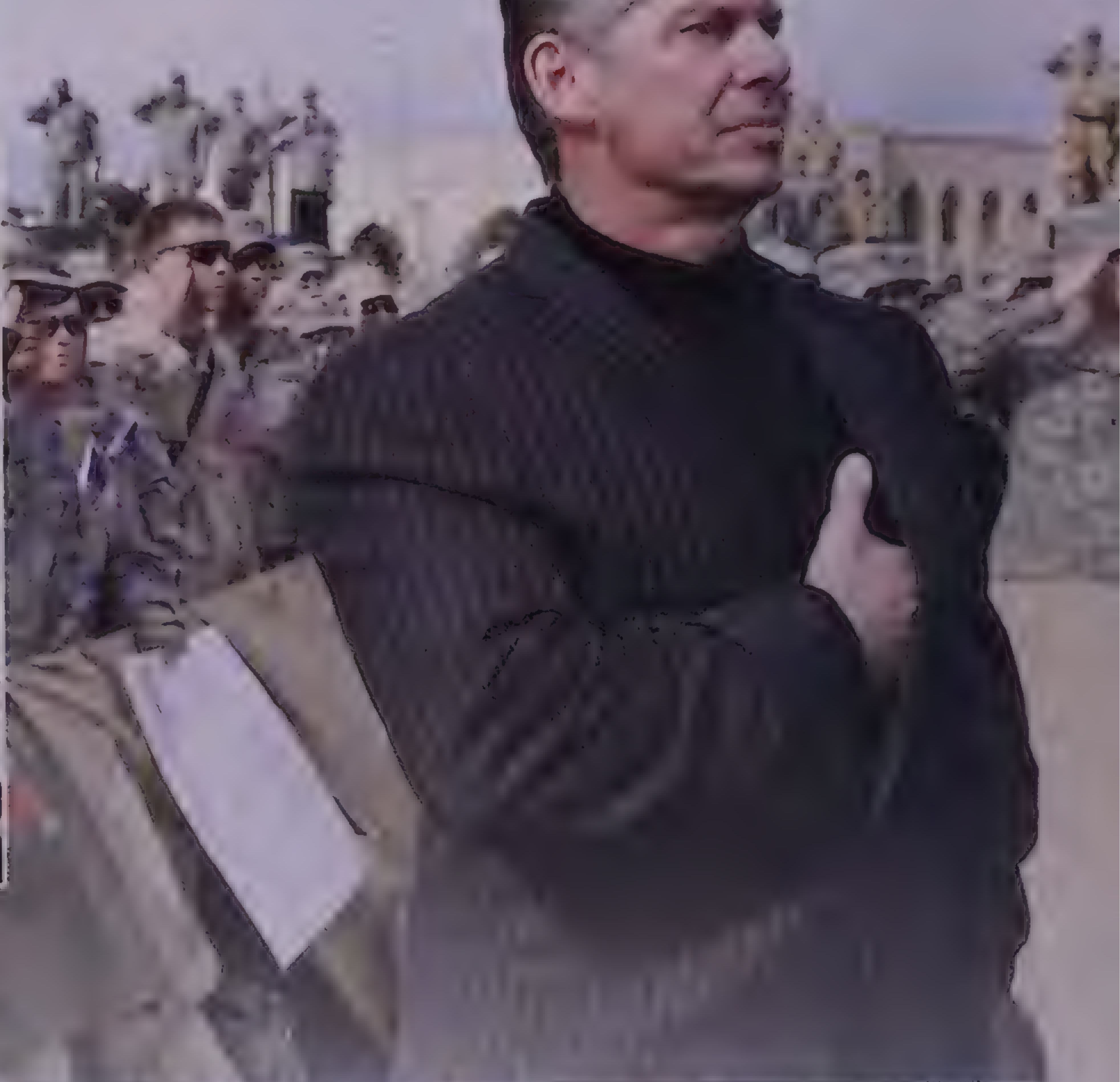


55 Giving back to the community has always been a part of Vince and Linda's vision of the company. And they do it because it's the right thing to do first and foremost. It's always been a part of the DNA of the company.



— Michelle D. Wilson

WWE's Military pillar supports the brave men and women of the United States Armed Forces. The program not only offers free entertainment for active military, but also helps provide workforce assistance for veterans through its partnership with Hire Heroes USA. Other WWE partners include the USO and Troop Tree, a video communication service that enables deployed military to keep in touch with their friends and family back home.

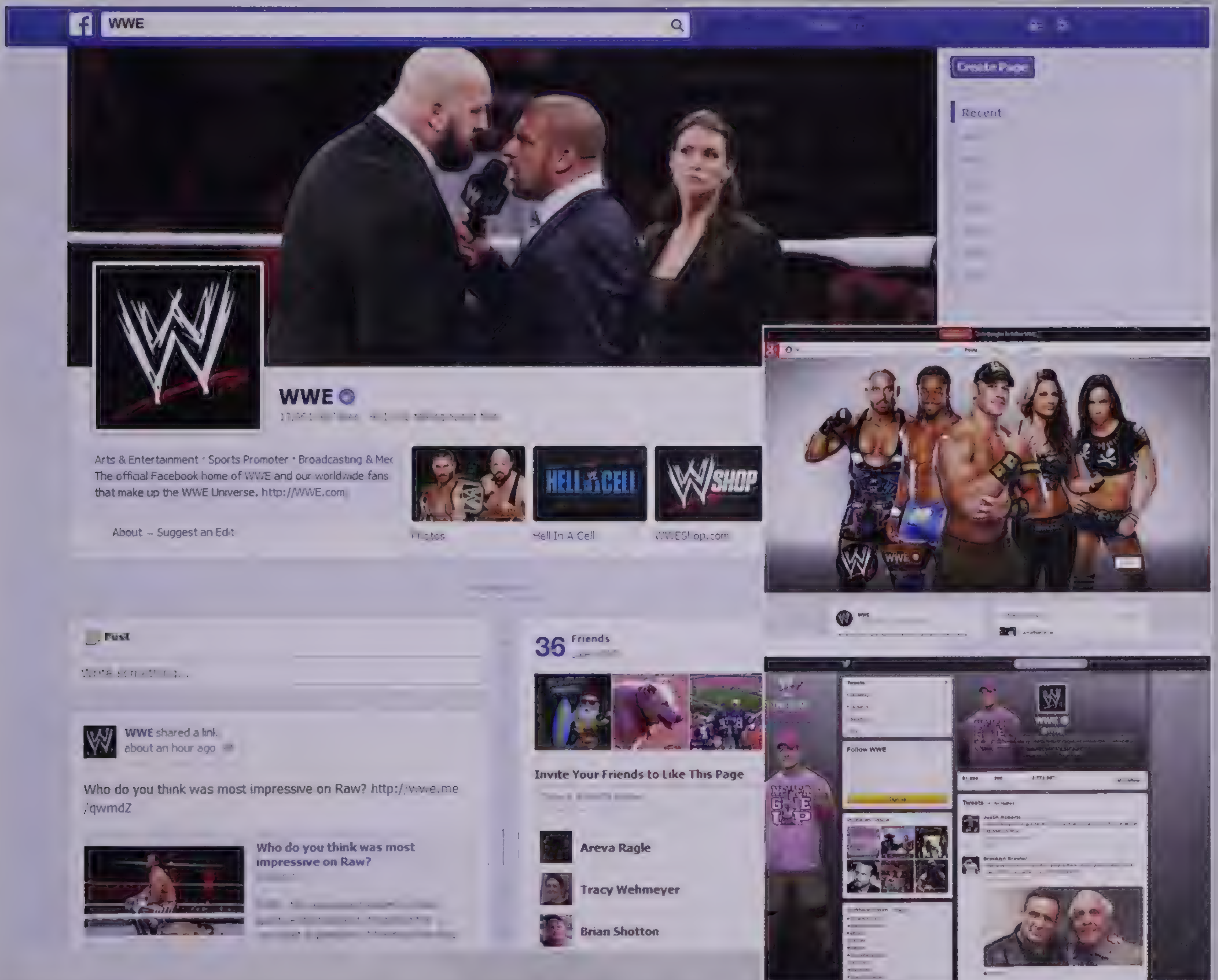


SOCIAL MEDIA

With more than 220 million social media followers, WWE has positioned itself as a qualified leader in the social media space, and one that other sports and entertainment entities strive to mimic. On Facebook, WWE has garnered more Likes than both the NFL and MLB *combined*. And on Twitter, @WWE's followership bests that of @UFC, @NHL, @NASCAR, and @MLB. From an individual Superstar standpoint, the story remains the same: WWE is a major force. There is not a single NFL, MLB, or MMA athlete with more Twitter followers than John Cena.

WWE recognizes its strong social media presence as an opportunity to have one-on-one relationships with its millions of followers. Instead of relying on fans to call their friends to tell them they saw "Million Dollar Man" Ted DiBiase pick up all the tabs at a local restaurant, which is how WWE utilized the word-of-mouth method in the past, the company can now create and engage in the conversation in a more direct and impactful manner on social media.

Utilizing Twitter, Facebook, Tout, and WWE's other social networking platforms has also allowed the company to become a storyteller 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In the past, WWE's creative writers were tasked with creating compelling content two days a week (Monday's *Raw* and Friday's *SmackDown*).



With social media, WWE now weaves its stories in and out of various platforms throughout the entire week. For example, after Cody Rhodes was fired on *Raw* in September 2013, WWE didn't wait until the following Monday to advance the storyline. Instead, Tweets from Goldust, Dusty Rhodes, Stephanie McMahon, Brad Maddox, and others kept the narrative flowing even when *Raw* wasn't on the air.



Joey Styles and the WWE.com crew creating content for WWE's various digital platforms

"Social media has become a whole new toy chest for our organization to continue to tell stories," says Wilson. "To me, I don't even say it's our future anymore. It's our reality today and it will be a critical part of our strategic priorities moving forward, both from a marketing and storytelling perspective."

Aside from conversation creation and storyline continuation, social media also allows members of the WWE Universe to oftentimes drive the content of *Raw* and *SmackDown*. From deciding match stipulations to naming Superstar opponents, WWE's social media platforms have been among the first to give fans a voice in shows' outcomes.

"The secret to the success of WWE is our fans," says Stephanie McMahon. "Our fans are a part of our show; they always have been. They interact, they engage, they tell us what they like, they tell us what they don't like. And social media allows them to be a part of our show without actually being at our show. That's one of the reasons why it's been so successful for us, because our fans have been a part of our show. It's a community and they want to be a part of it and now they can be, even if *Raw* or *SmackDown* is not in their town."

WWE'S WELLNESS POLICY

With the goal of protecting its Superstars and Divas from the oftentimes physically and mentally demanding sports-entertainment lifestyle, WWE implemented a comprehensive Talent Wellness Program in February 2006.

"The WWE's Wellness Policy is all about the health and longevity of our performers," says Stephanie McMahon. "It's about their cardio, it's about their blood work, drug testing is a part of it, we have impact testing to manage against concussions. We have a variety of all of these different programs built into place. There's also an orthopedic; we have doctors on the road that travel with us for every show. There's a doctor dedicated to each brand, in addition to our trainers. It's challenging and expensive, quite frankly, to stay on top of all that, but nothing is more important than our Superstars and Divas. Without them, we wouldn't have a product and their health and longevity is of utmost priority."

Administered by an independent team of physicians, which includes Sr. Ringside Physician Dr. Christopher Amann and Ringside Physician Dr. Michael Sampson, who Jerry "The King" Lawler credits with saving his life following a September 2012 heart attack, the Talent Wellness Program has been refined and expanded to cover the following:

Ringside Physicians Dr. Christopher Amann and Dr. Michael Sampson



licensed and treating physician. The use of masking agents and/or diuretics to conceal or obscure the use of prohibited drugs is also forbidden.

Dr. David L. Black, Ph.D., D-ABFT, FAIC, of Aegis Sciences Corporation, independently administers the policy. Aegis provides drug testing for sports organizations, crime laboratories, corporations, and universities throughout the world.

Annual Physical Examinations and Blood Screening

The Wellness Program includes physical examinations and blood screening for all WWE talent every six months. The examinations and screening are undertaken with a goal of identifying issues before they manifest into symptoms of disease, illness, or injury.

Referrals to Consulting Health Care Providers

WWE offers all WWE talent the opportunity for referral to qualified health care professionals who can help them with issues that may arise from time to time. Under the supervision of Dr. Maroon, WWE has established relationships with renowned specialists in psychiatry, orthopedics, and endocrinology.

Comprehensive Medical and Wellness Staffing Infrastructure

WWE's Medical Director, Dr. Joseph Maroon, oversees the Talent Wellness Program, which includes a comprehensive medical and wellness staff and infrastructure. Dr. Maroon's responsibilities include the supervision of ringside physicians and athletic trainers, and the administrative oversight of medical care and drug testing for WWE talent. Dr. Maroon is a board certified Professor of Neurosurgery at the University of Pittsburgh and has been the Team Neurosurgeon for the Pittsburgh Steelers for more than 25 years.

Cardiovascular Testing and Monitoring Program

All WWE talent undergo extensive cardiovascular evaluation before they are offered a contract by WWE, and are subsequently tested at least biennially while under contract and often more frequently when circumstances warrant.

Mandatory ImPACT™ Testing

All WWE talent undergo ImPACT™ concussion testing. Monitoring and analysis are done through the ImPACT™ Concussion Management Program, which is used by the NFL, NHL, MLB, MLS, US Olympic Training Center, and in more than 400 colleges and 2,000 high schools. ImPACT™ testing is a tool to measure talents' memory and reaction time post-concussion. Baseline testing is done on an annual basis. In October 2013, the Sports Legacy Institute honored WWE with the Impact Award, which recognizes organizations and individuals for their commitment to solving the concussion epidemic.

Substance Abuse and Drug Testing Policy

The Substance Abuse and Drug Testing Policy prohibits the use of drugs by WWE talent for other than a legitimate medical purpose pursuant to a valid prescription from a

THE FUTURE

CULTIVATING NEW TALENT

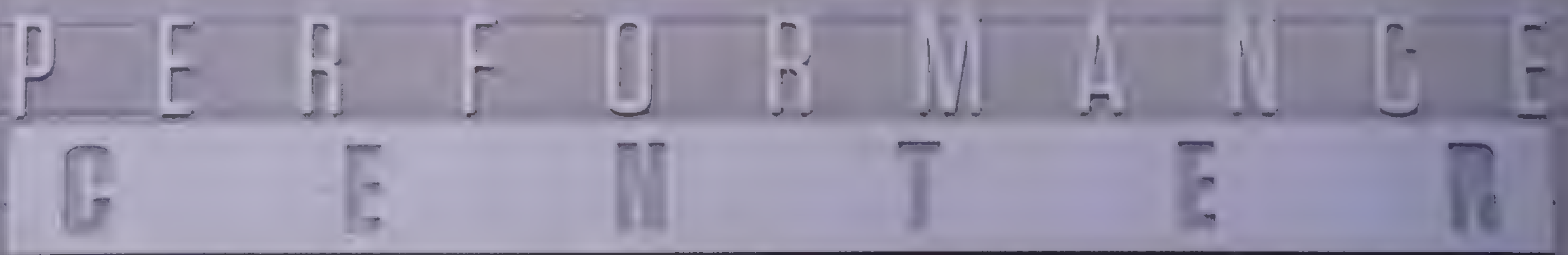
With the goal of maintaining elite levels of success for generations to come, WWE continues to feverishly invest in its future. In the past few years alone, the sports-entertainment empire has launched a groundbreaking mobile application, introduced the unique, animated world of *WWE Slam City*, and produced new weekly programming such as *Main Event* and the wildly popular reality series, *Total Divas*. But perhaps no new initiative has been more vital to the company's long-term success than the creation of the WWE Performance Center.

THE PERFORMANCE CENTER

Opened in July 2013, the Performance Center is a 26,000 square-foot world-class training facility that provides the company's talent developmental system, NXT, with the resources necessary to become the next generation of WWE Superstars. Never before had the sports-entertainment industry witnessed the creation of such an ambitious facility. And as a result of its all-encompassing training efforts, an entire pool of new and qualified talent is being cultivated, something WWE had been missing for more than a decade.

"We're a victim of our own success. When you create one global brand, you shut down all the other places to get talent from," says Executive Vice President of Talent and Live Events, Paul "Triple H" Levesque. "There's a little bit of it left, but some of those places are so small and so shabby that it's hard to take a guy who's been wrestling for five years in other places and retrain him to how you want it done. Sometimes it's easier to take a guy from ground zero and teach him how to do it right, than it is to take a guy with five years of bad habits and get him out of them."

Breaking Ground on the new WWE Performance Center





Anchored by a 12,000 square-foot training room that houses seven rings, the Performance Center is strategically designed to simultaneously provide valuable ring time to the varying levels of NXT competitors. And with closed-circuit cameras throughout the facility, WWE executives in Stamford, Connecticut, can regularly check in on the training, particularly Levesque, who has connectivity to the Performance Center in his office at WWE headquarters.

“That’s my world,” says Levesque, referring to the in-ring training. “So I like to keep it on in the background. It allows me to check in for a few moments at a time and watch what’s going on. It doesn’t take me very long to see if somebody’s getting better.”

When not in the ring, NXT talent have access to a 5,500 square-foot state-of-the-art strength and conditioning room, best-in-class sports medicine program, private studio where they can practice on-camera techniques and work on character development, cutting-edge edit and production facilities, and talent relaxation area. The Performance Center also provides financial planning and other life-skills training needed to become a complete WWE Superstar.

The Performance Center began attracting athletes from all over the world immediately after opening its doors. Among the leagues whose athletes are hoping to one day become WWE Superstars are Premiership Rugby and the NFL. For them, the facility offers an unrivaled training environment coupled with a desirable location in Orlando, Florida, where there’s a low cost of living and no state income tax. For WWE, the Performance Center location further solidified the company’s already-existing presence in Orlando, which began with a partnership with Full Sail University.

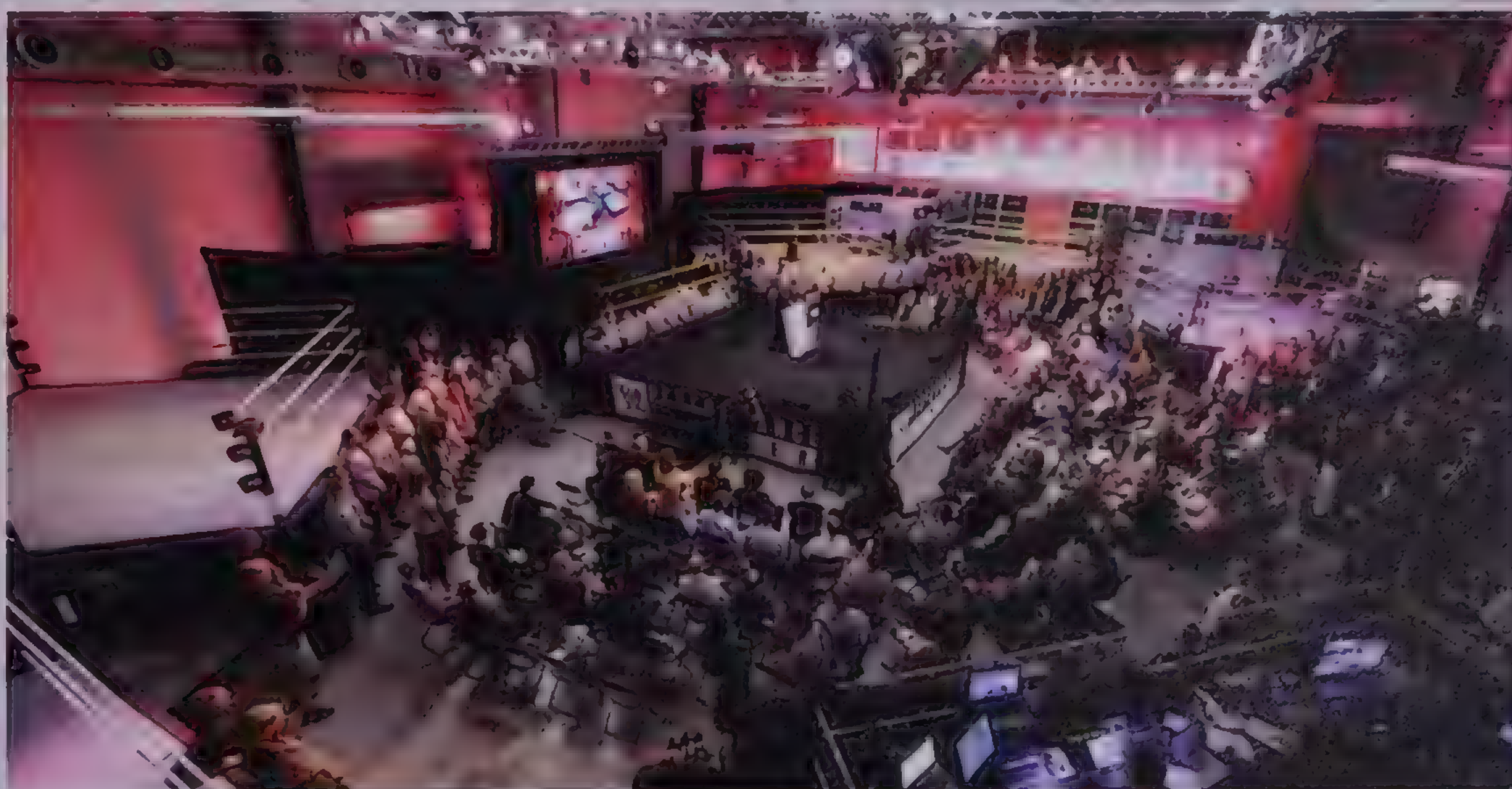
MOVING FORWARD

In May 2012, WWE and Full Sail University entered into an innovative agreement that moved live tapings of *NXT*, WWE’s weekly one-hour show that broadcasts on WWE.com and in more than 60 countries worldwide, to Full Sail Live, the university’s state-of-the-art performance venue. As part of the partnership, students of the university’s entertainment-focused degree programs have the opportunity to work alongside WWE to produce *NXT*. Furthermore, all proceeds from ticket and merchandise sales go toward a scholarship fund for students enrolled at or who are planning to attend Full Sail University.

When we shoot a show at Full Sail, they have about 30 students working behind the scenes. That’s real-world experience for them with a professional staff.



— Paul “Triple H” Levesque



"My key looking area was Orlando because Full Sail is there," says Levesque. "I wanted to be close to Full Sail because of our partnership, and I wanted their students to be able to come over and work on our equipment. The whole place is one huge mesh wheel between Full Sail and the Performance Center, and it allows their students to work in our facility and our students to work in theirs."

Realizing the impact WWE could have on its economy, the Florida government, led by Governor Rick Scott, did all they could to land the Performance Center, including offering tax incentives, pushing permits through, and even helping find the right building. Any impediments that could've made the process longer, the government aggressively eliminated to ensure the Sunshine State became the Performance Center's home.



The Shield, the Wyatts, Damien Sandow, Big E. Langston... all these guys came directly out of our system. Now, you can say they came from indies, like Seth Rollins; he was a big indies guy. But ask Seth how hard he and I fought on how to do things our way. Then ask him if he thinks we were right: he will tell you 100 percent we were.

— Paul "Triple H" Levesque



With the Performance Center in Orlando, Florida saw the creation of nearly 100 high-wage jobs, as well as the infusion of WWE developmental talent and employees into its economy. That's dozens of new individuals living, eating, training, and spending money in the state.

"Creating new, high-value jobs has been a top priority for my administration since day one. The grand opening of the amazing WWE Performance Center is terrific news for our local economy," said Orange County Mayor Teresa Jacobs in a July 2013 press release. "Not only are these great jobs, the presence of the WWE Performance Center adds to Central Florida's reputation as a television, film, and entertainment production hub."

With the support of the local government and a sound infrastructure in place, WWE has wasted no time in its quest to create the next generation of Superstars. Realizing the young men and women in NXT today are the lifeblood of the industry tomorrow, WWE now uses the Performance Center's vast resources to build the most athletically-bulletproof performers before ever debuting them on *Raw* and *SmackDown*. It is this tier of advanced, grad-school type training that's ensuring the sports-entertainment industry remains healthy for another 50 years.

"When we put somebody from NXT on TV now, they're going to be polished," says Levesque. "That spotlight is bright from day one. You're either getting over or you're not, and that decision is made very quickly. So I'm going to make damn sure everybody that comes out of there is ready, so that when we put them on TV, Vince doesn't look at me in **Gorilla** and say, 'What were you thinking with that guy?' I've seen that happen before with talent. The goal is, I want to put people on TV and I want Vince to say, 'Yeah, holy crap, we have a player.'"

GORILLA POSITION

Named in honor of WWE Superstar and legendary commentator Gorilla Monsoon, the Gorilla Position is the area just behind the curtain where Vince McMahon and the WWE Staff watch the show on a monitor and communicate with the production truck.

Over the past five decades, WWE has become an iconic global brand that has created some of the most memorable moments in entertainment history. In 1985, it paired Hulk Hogan, Wendi Richter, and the rest of its Superstars with Cyndi Lauper and MTV to create the rock 'n' wrestling pop culture phenomenon. Two years later, a world indoor attendance record was set when 93,173 WWE fans filed into the Pontiac Silverdome for *WrestleMania III*. In 1998, Stone Cold Steve Austin captured the WWE Championship and the attention of fans everywhere, making it nearly impossible to walk down the street without seeing a black Austin 3:16 T-shirt. In 2001, WWE's final form of competition was eradicated when the company acquired WCW. And today, Superstars such as Undertaker and John Cena are making *WrestleMania* a weeklong celebration of the entire sports-entertainment industry.



With each historic event that passes, the story of WWE's undeniably remarkable history becomes even more epic. And now, thanks in large part to the foundation being laid by the Performance Center, WWE's future looks even brighter than its glorious past. At this very moment, soon-to-be WWE Superstars are tirelessly pushing themselves to the limit, realizing that their efforts today might one day propel them to the main event of *WrestleMania*.



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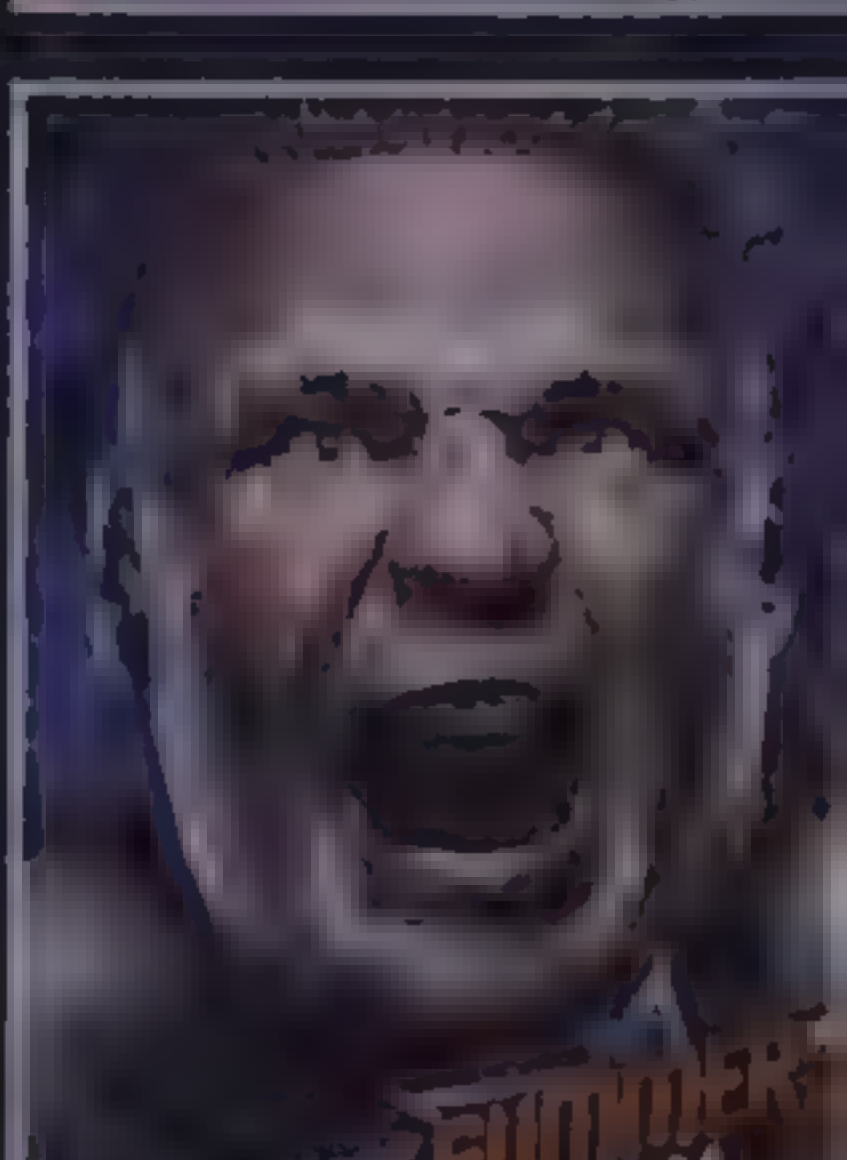
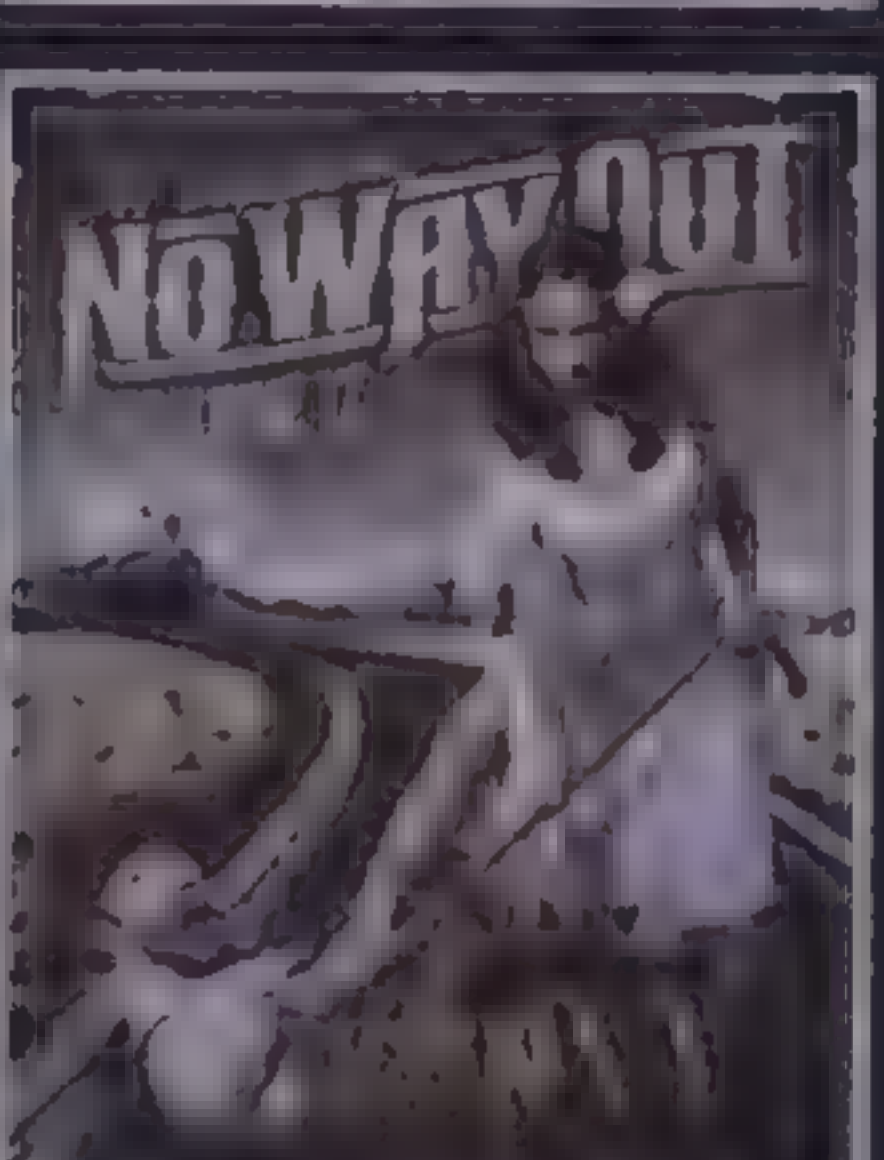
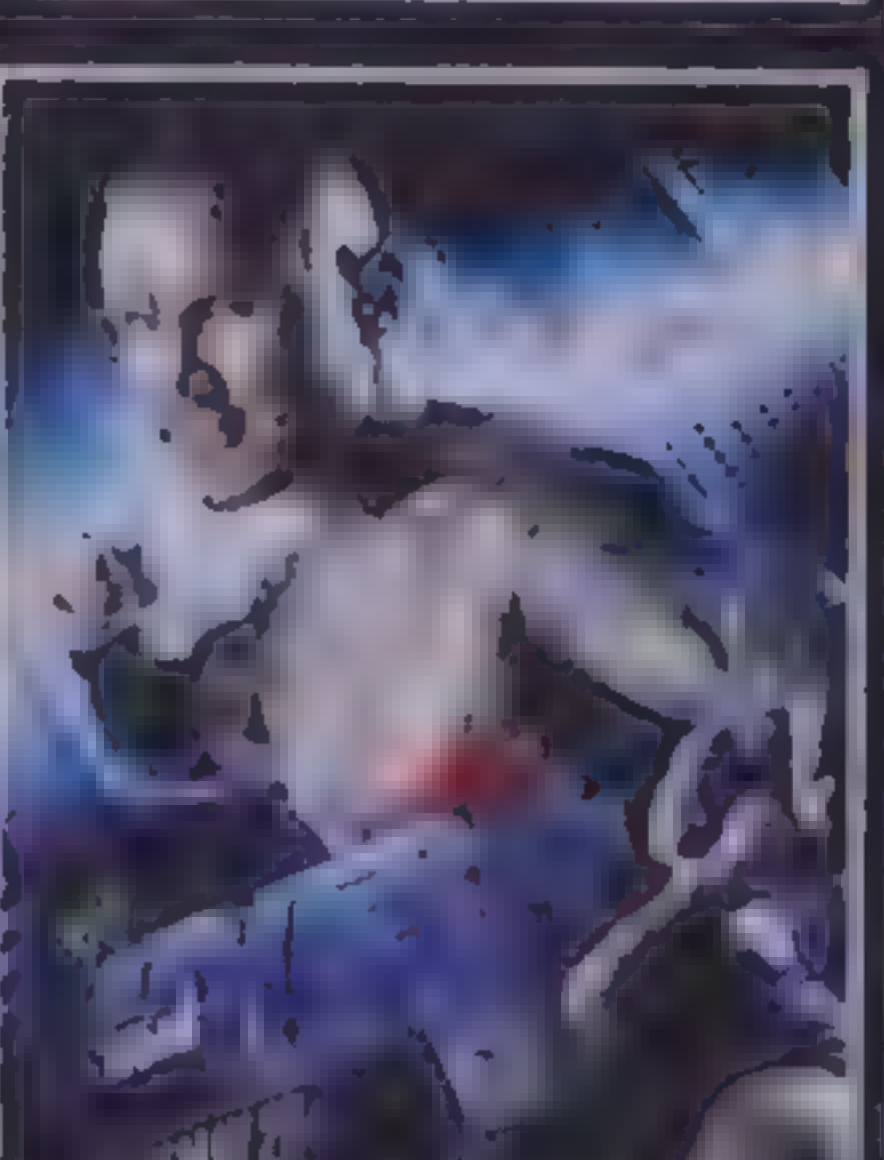
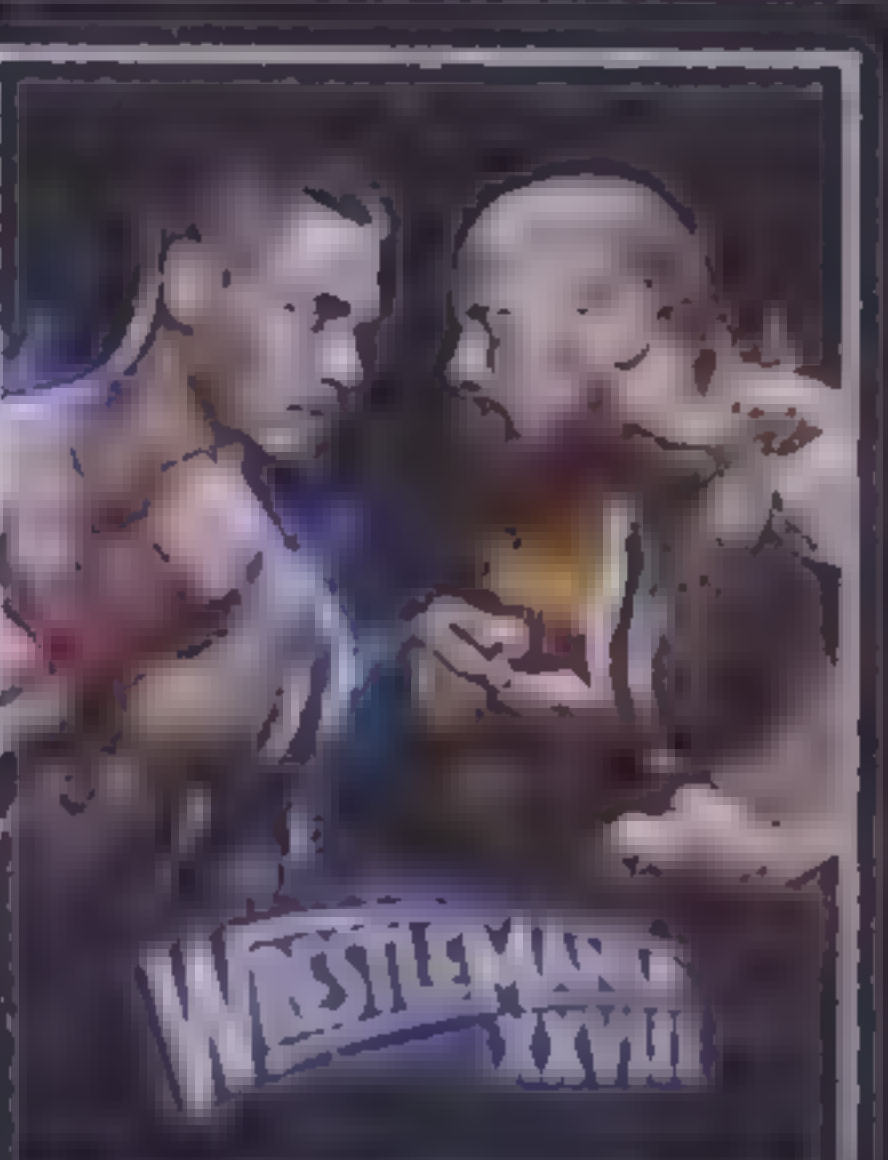
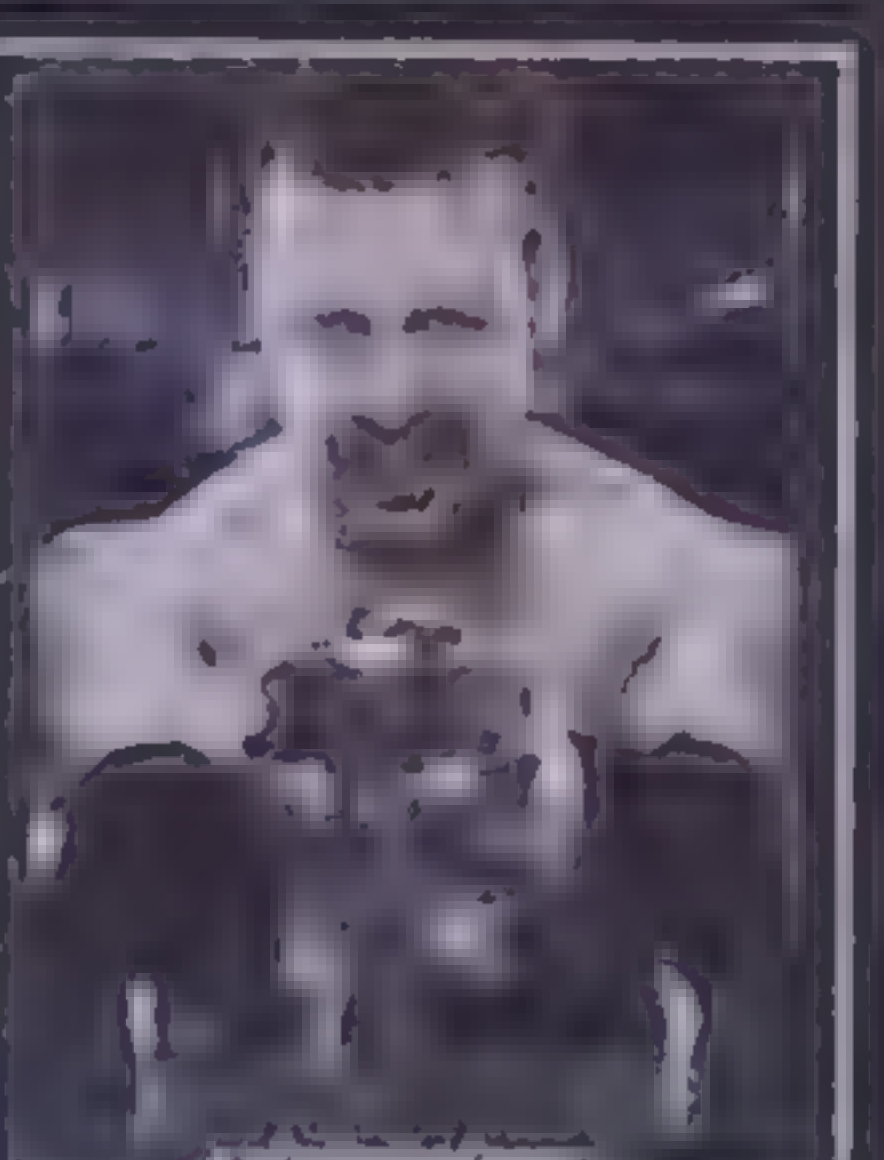
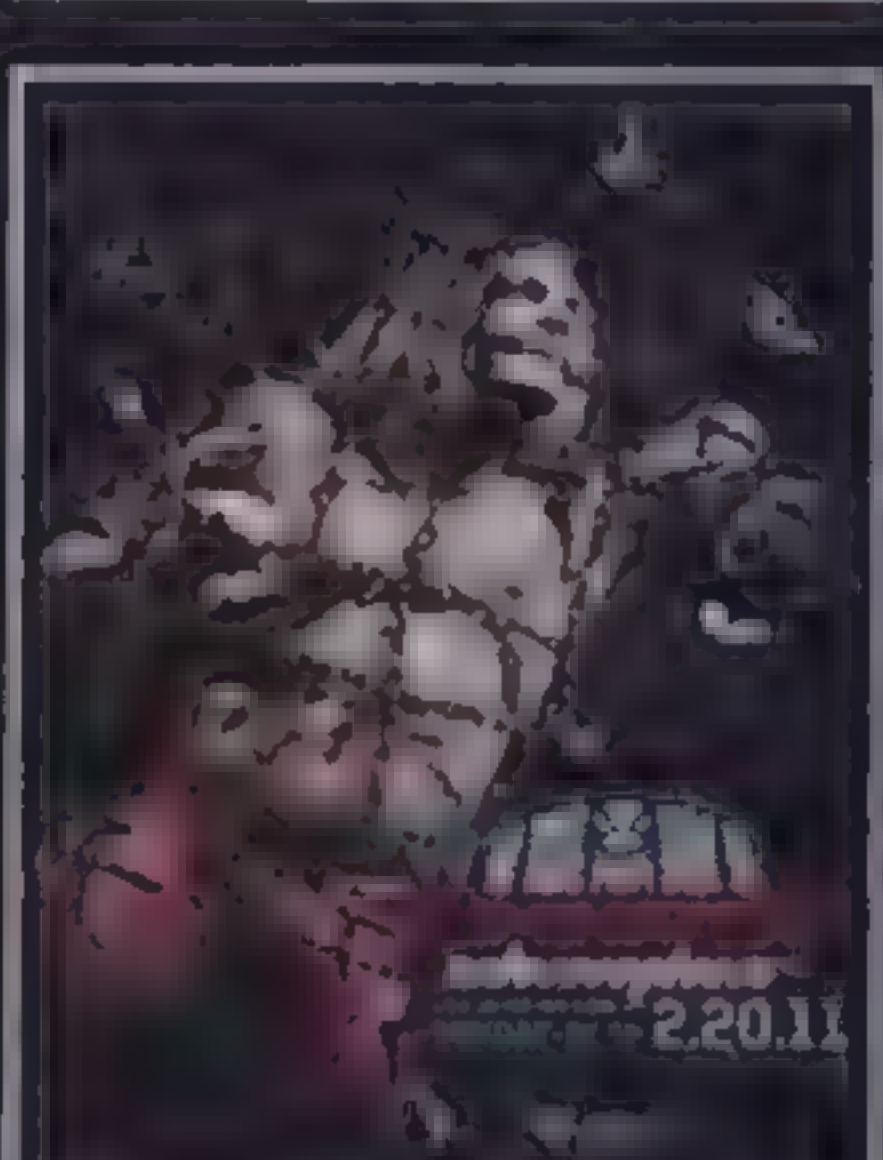
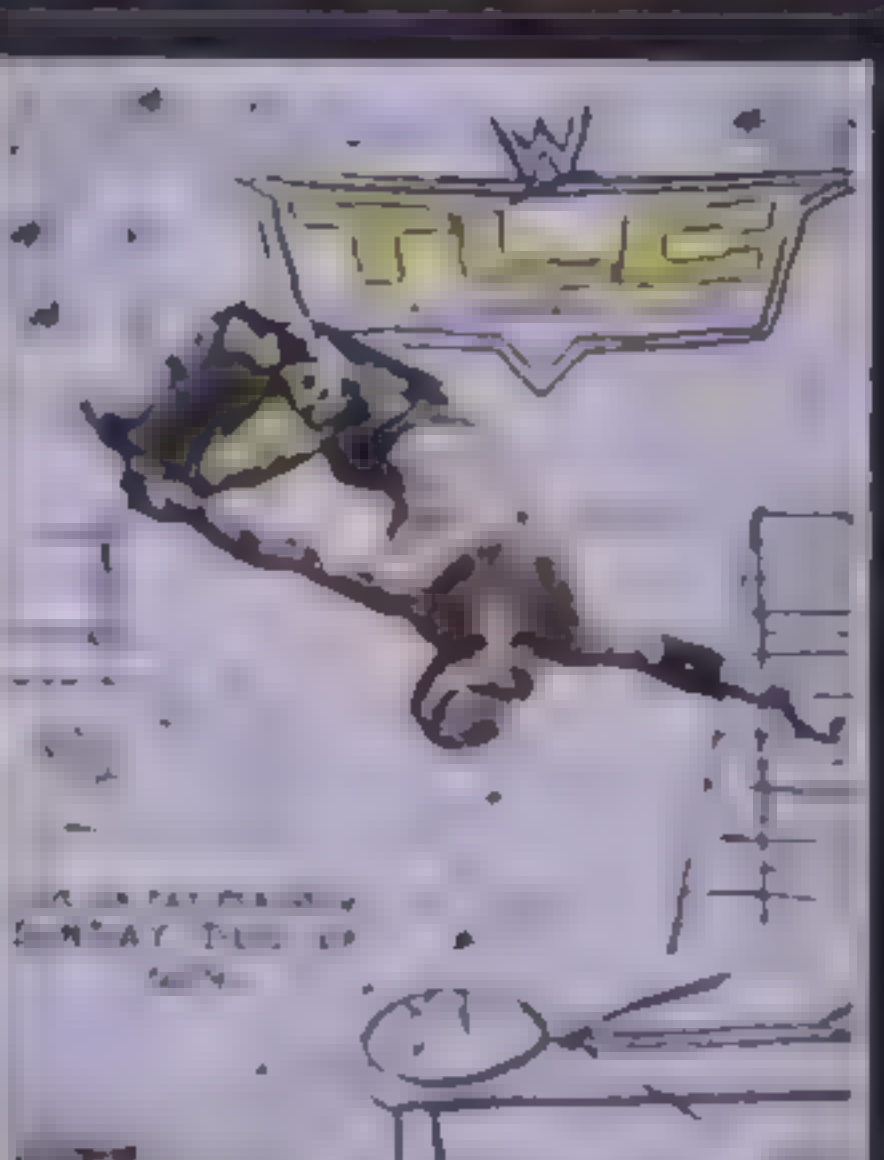
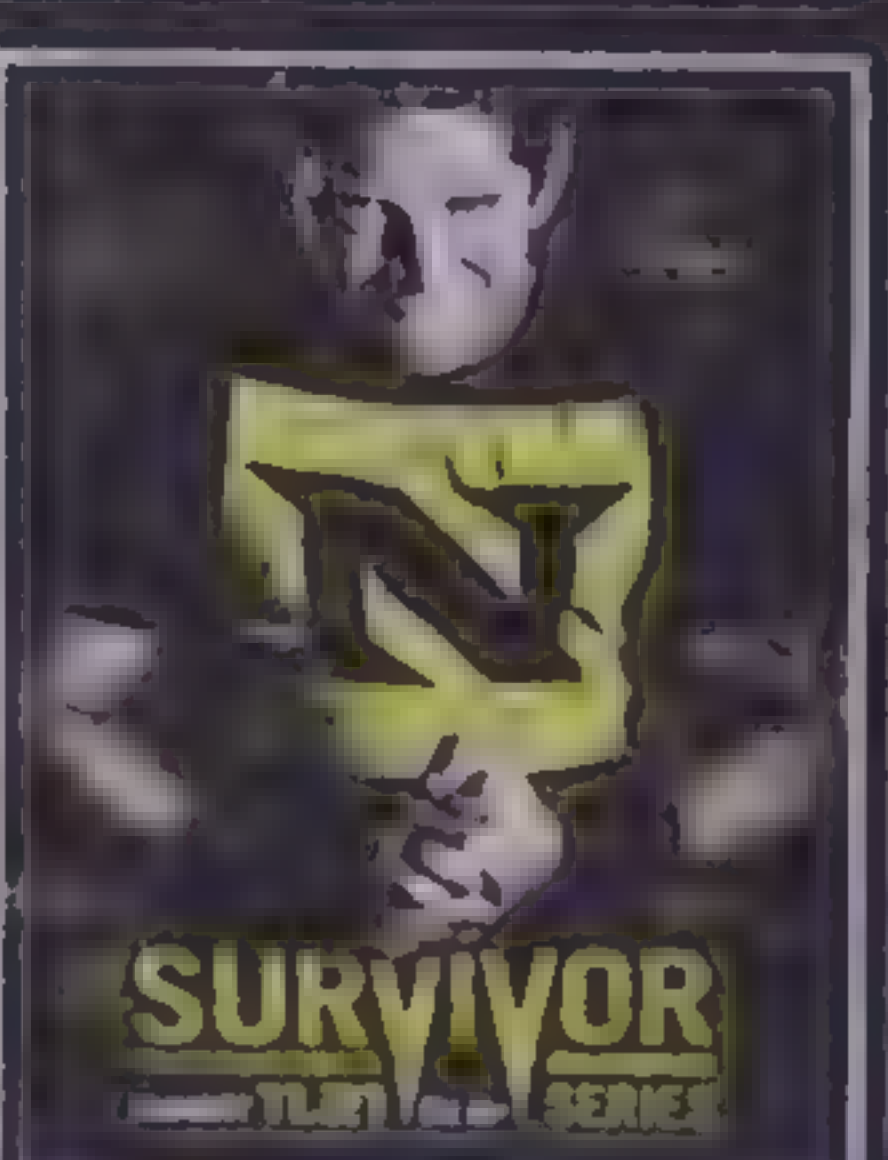
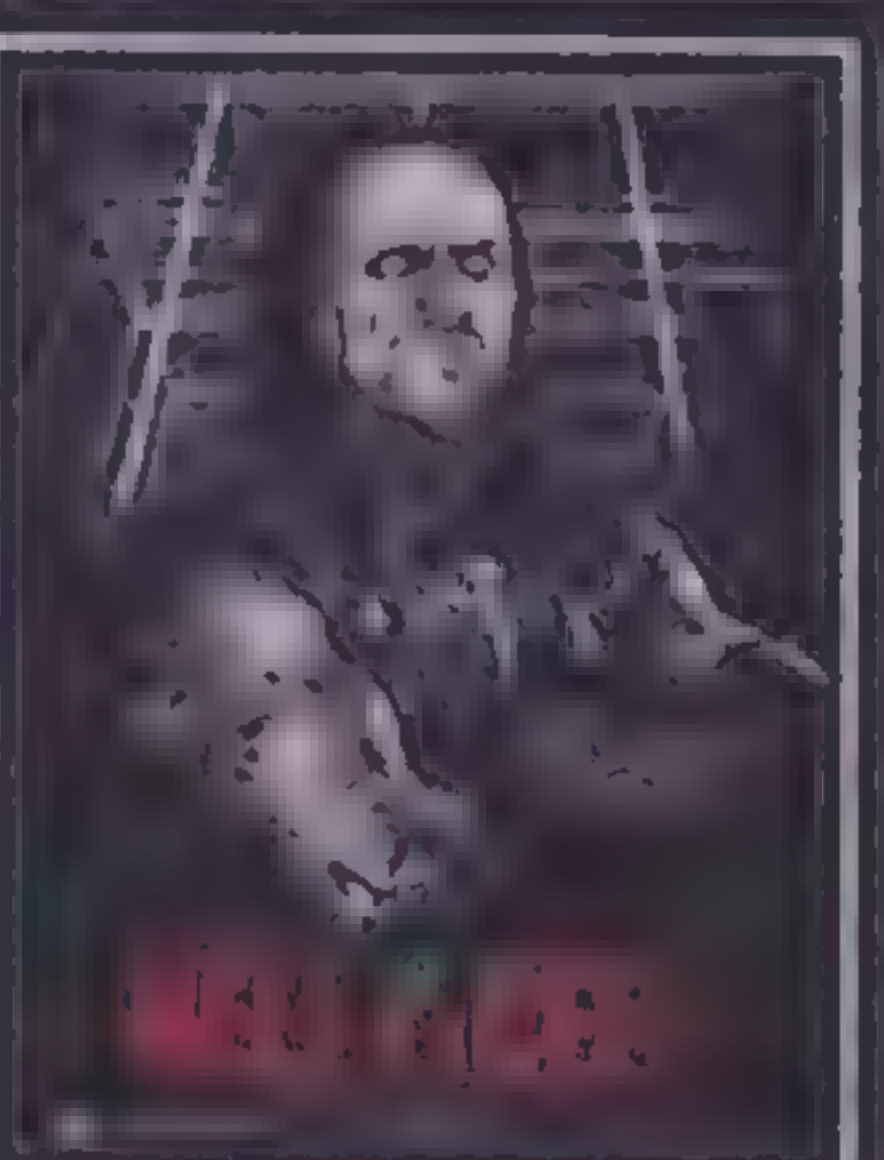
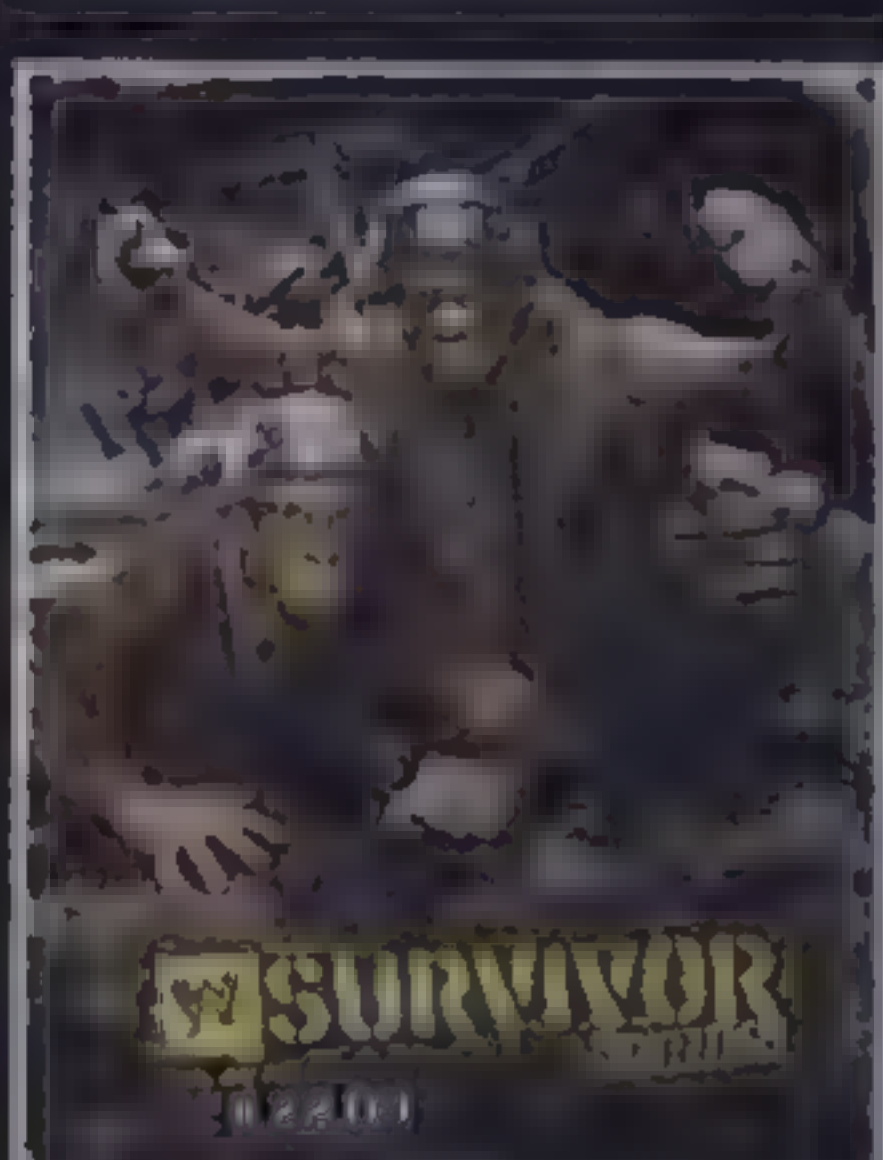
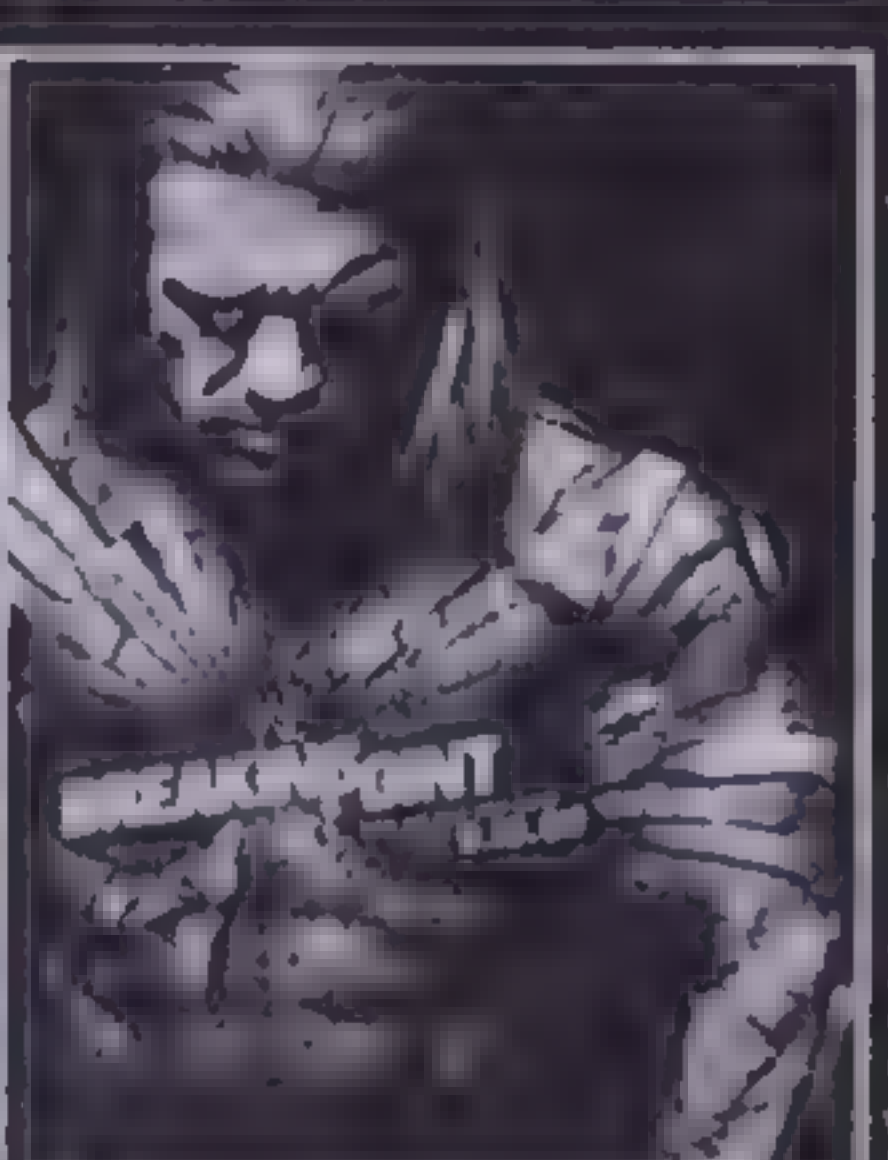
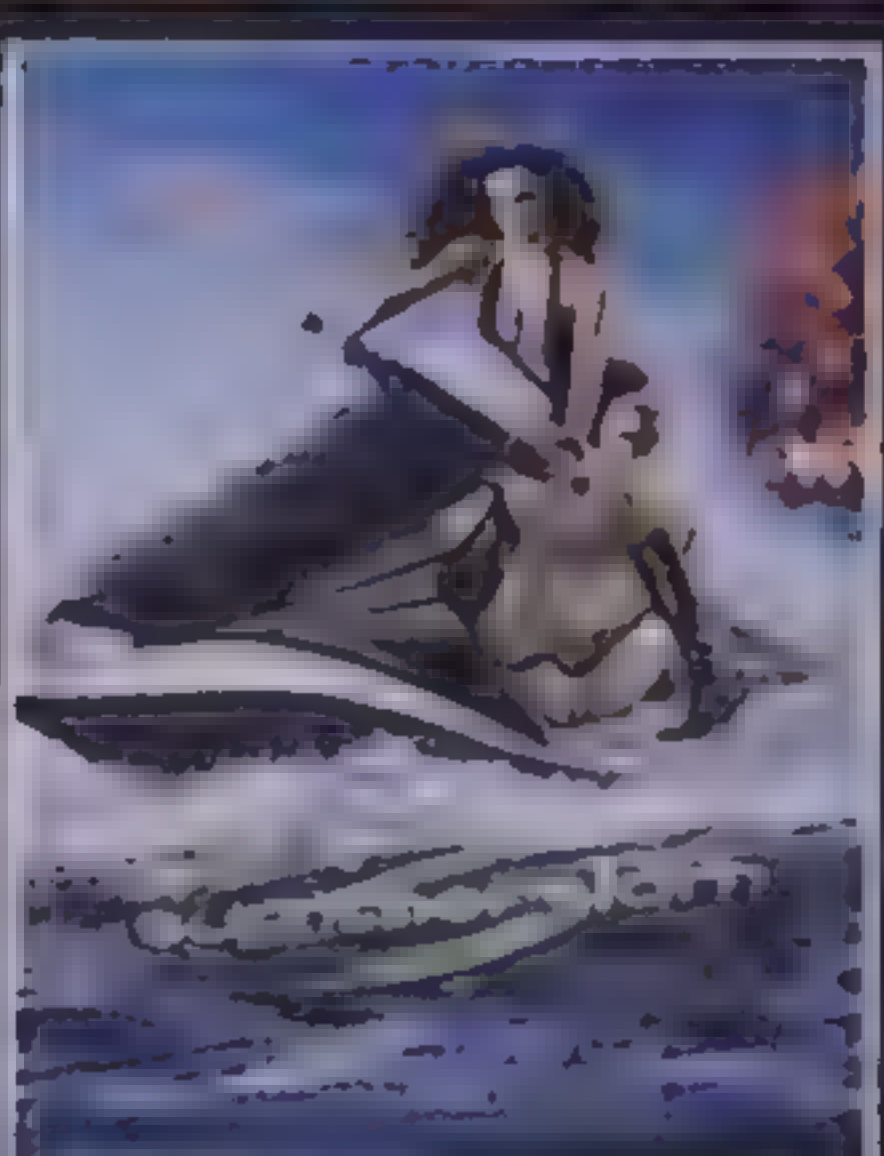
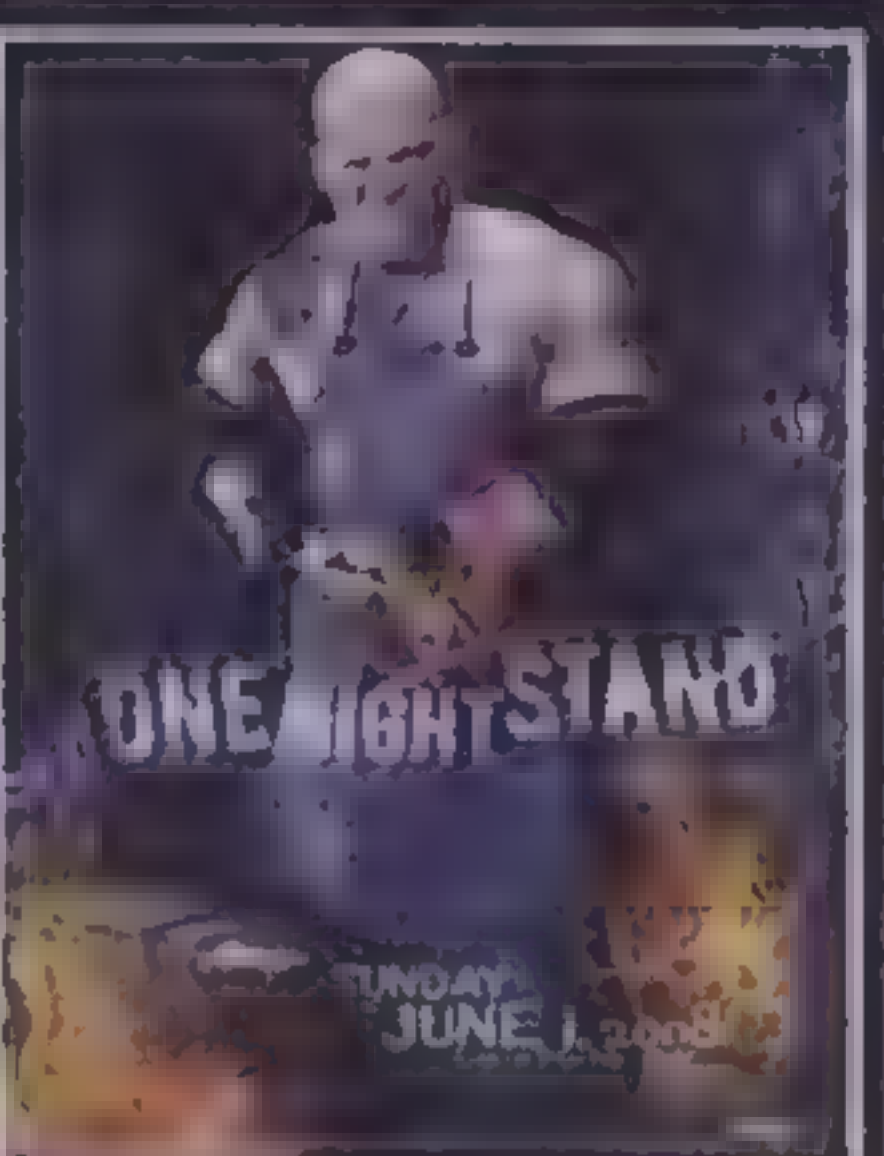
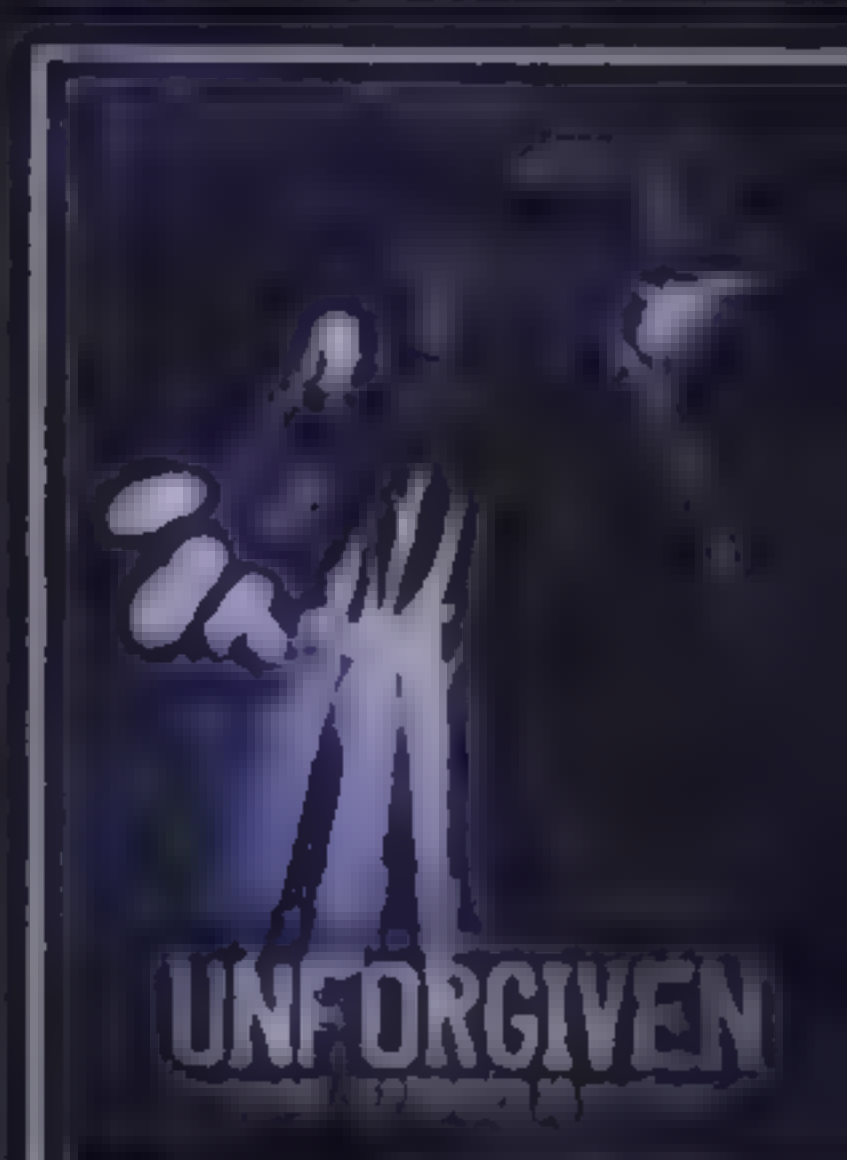
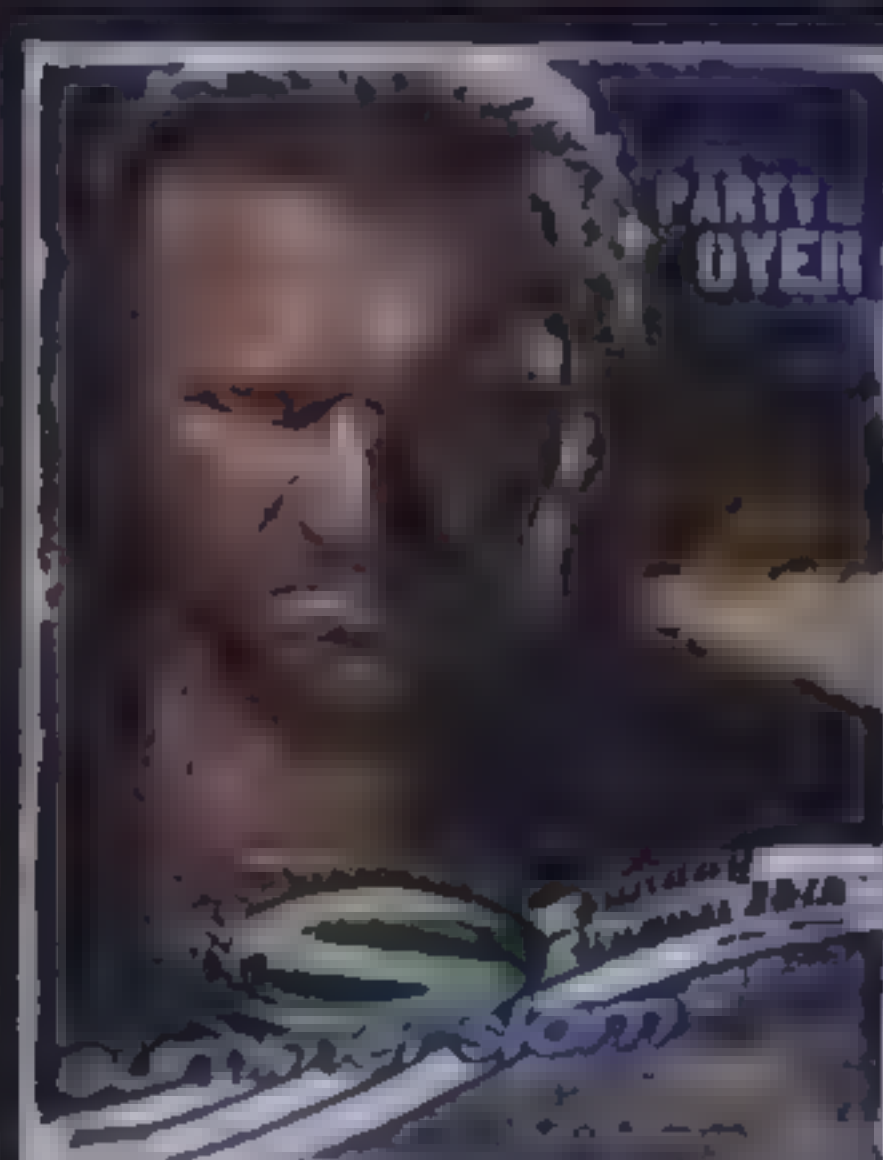
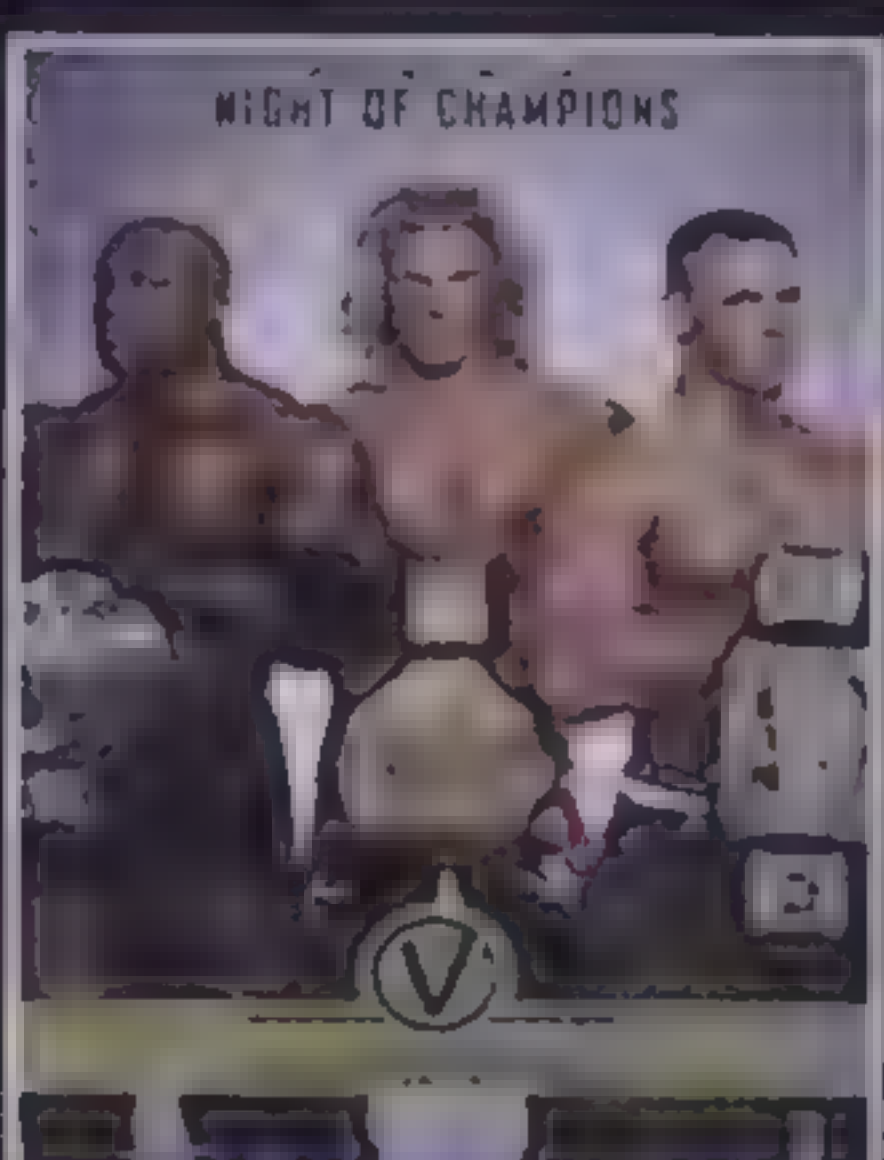
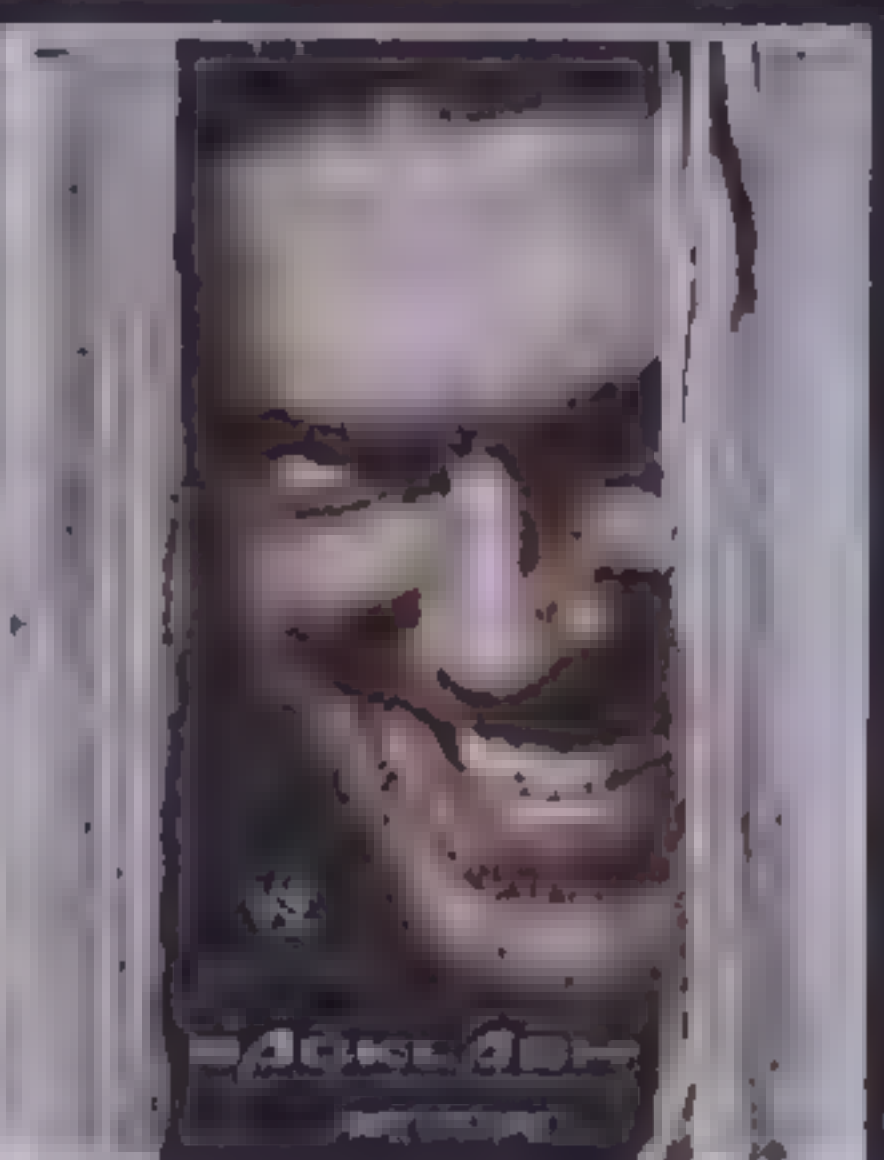
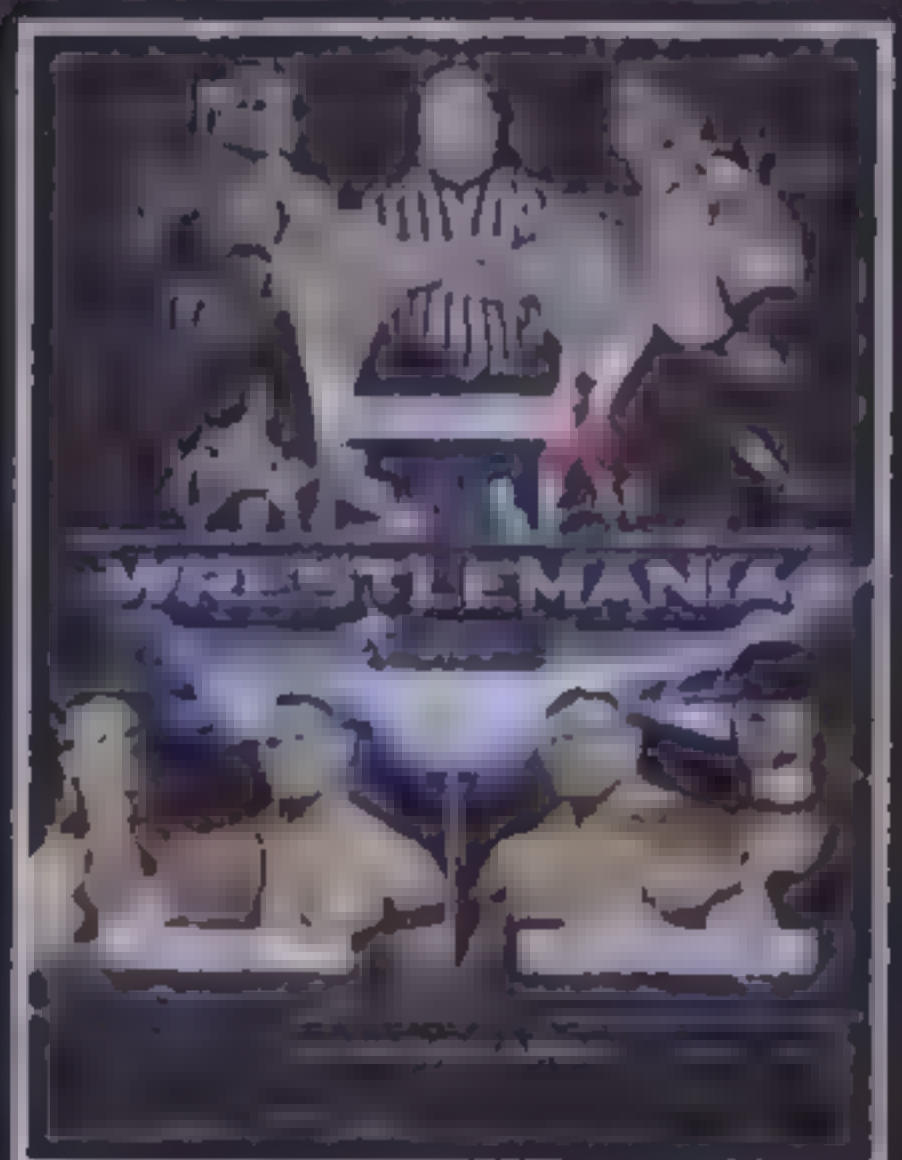
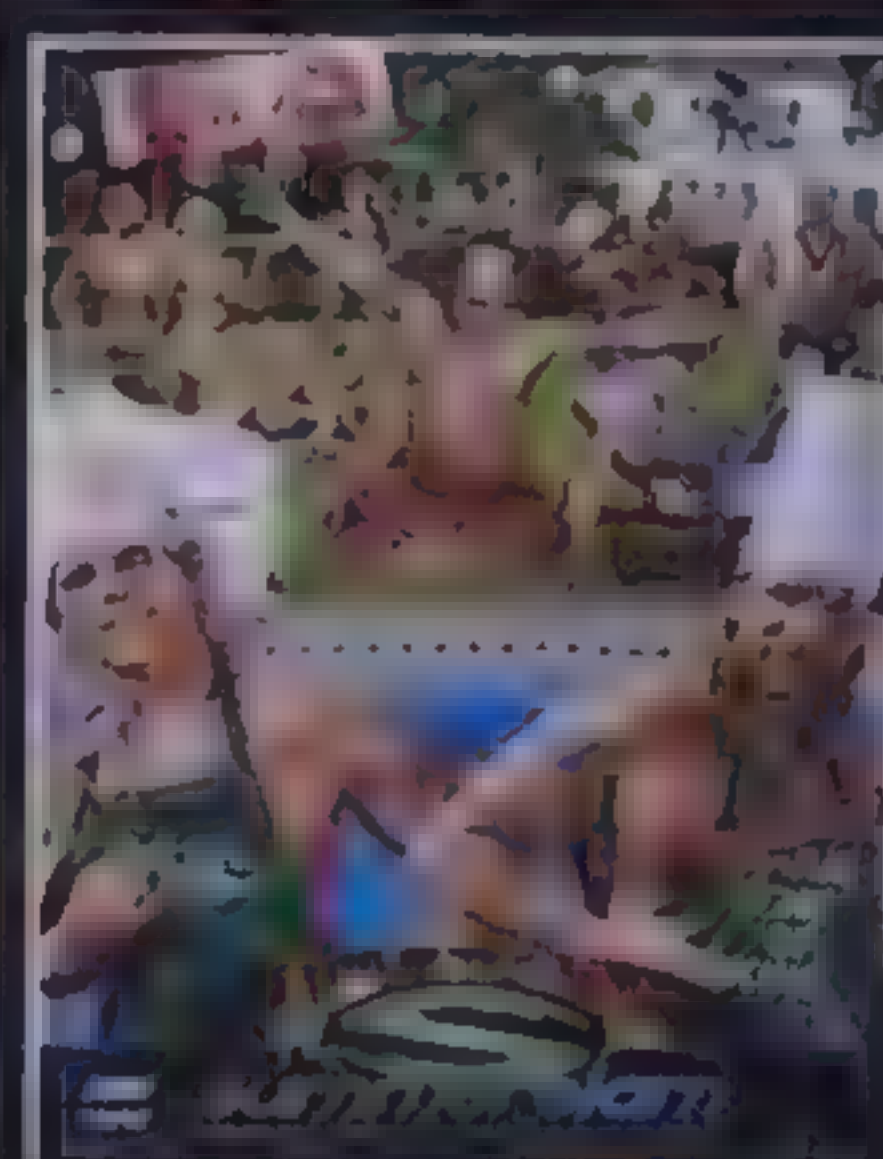
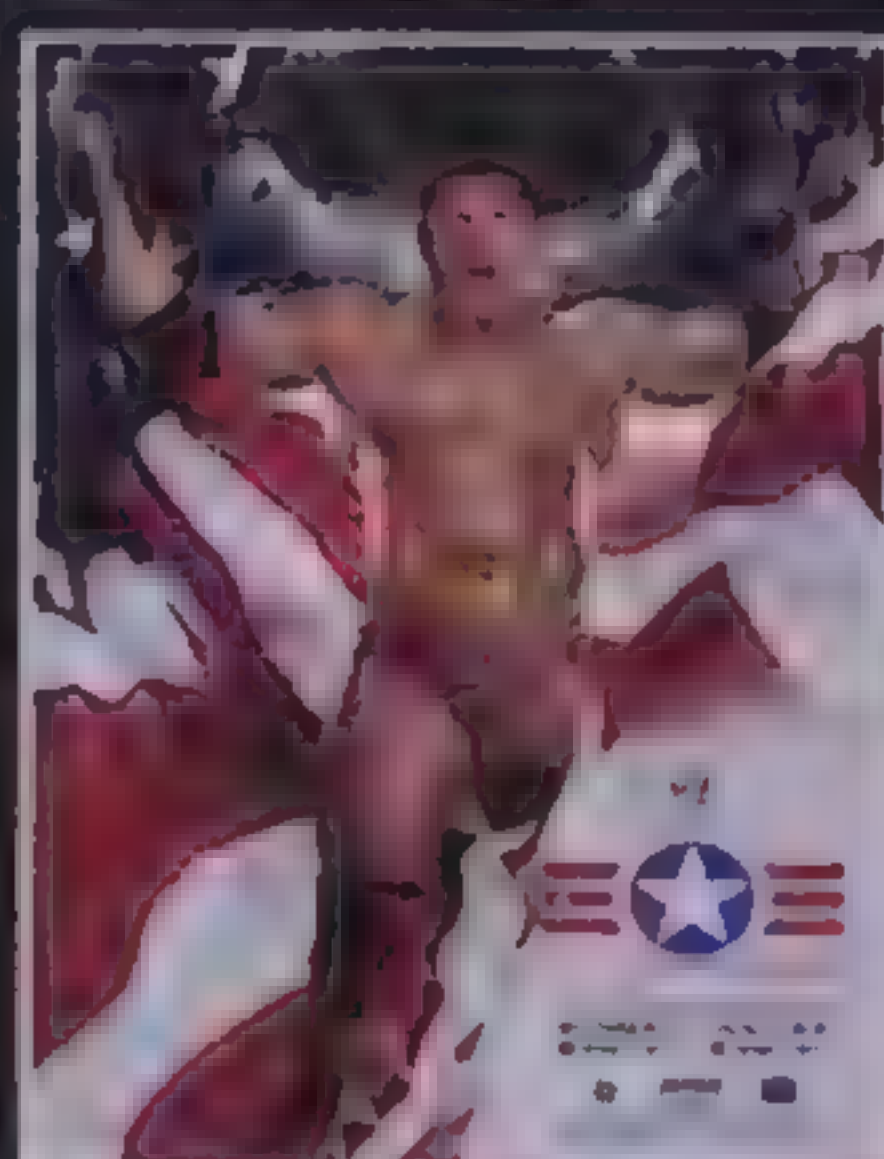
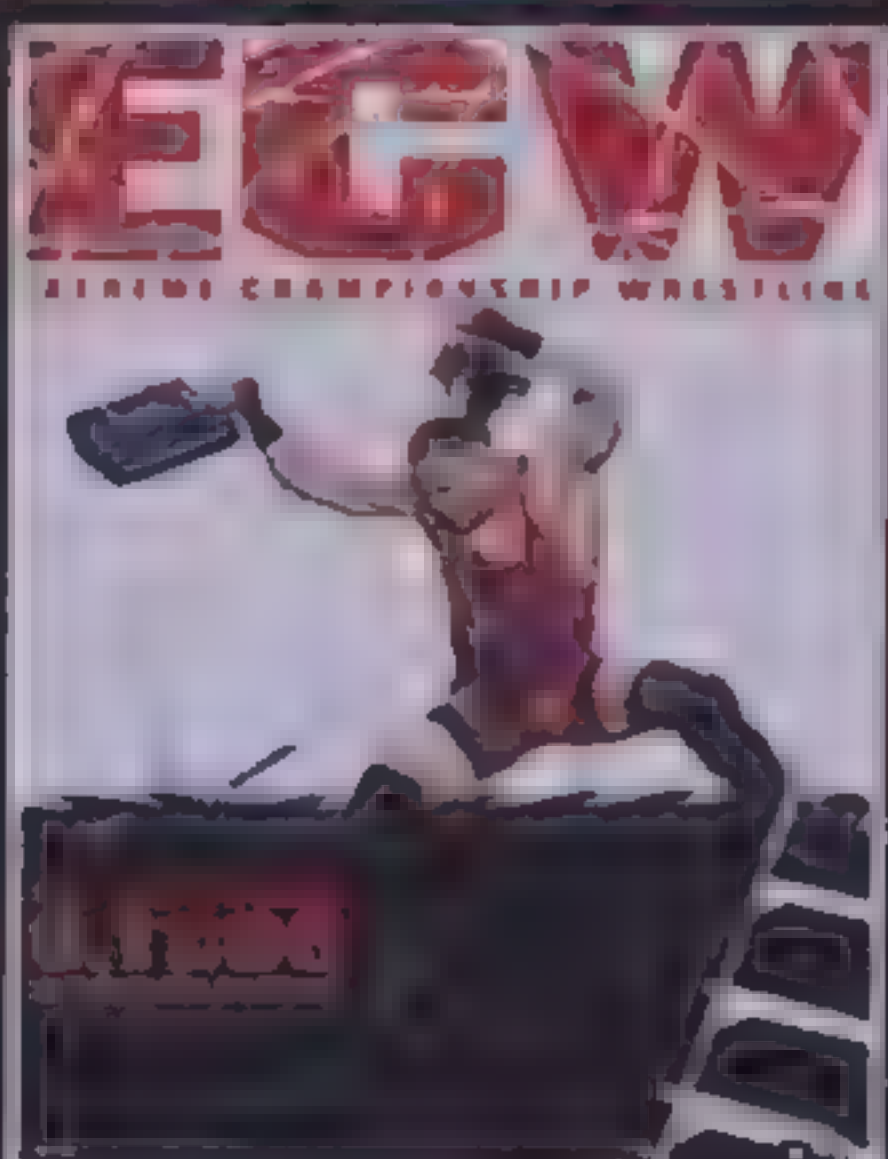
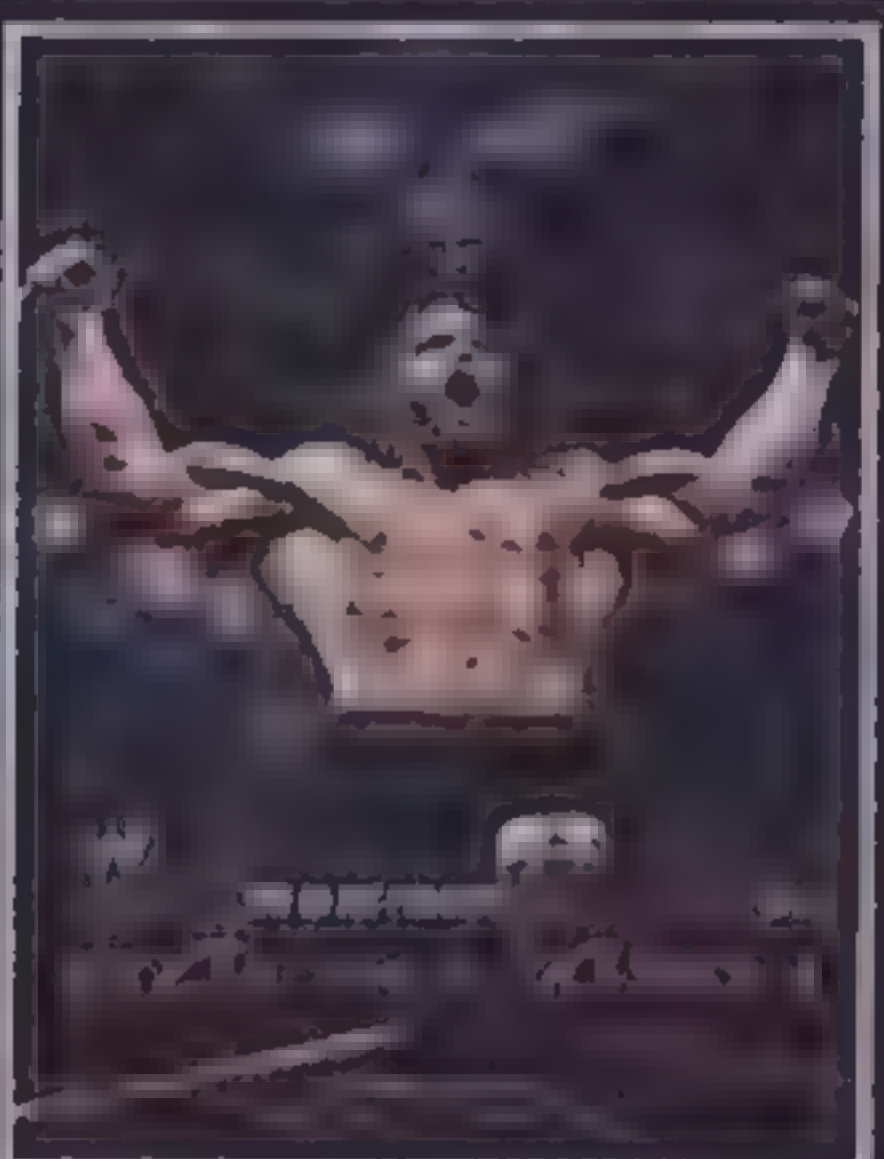
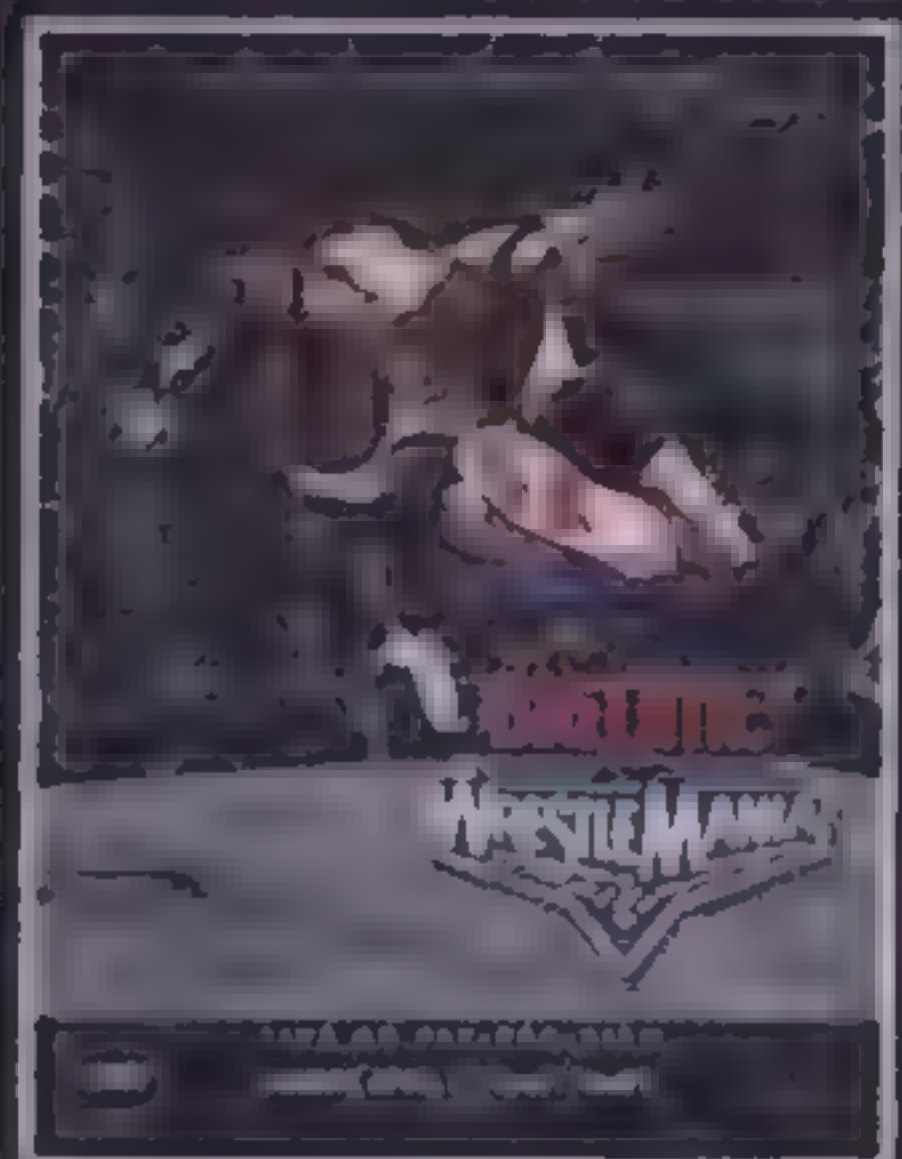
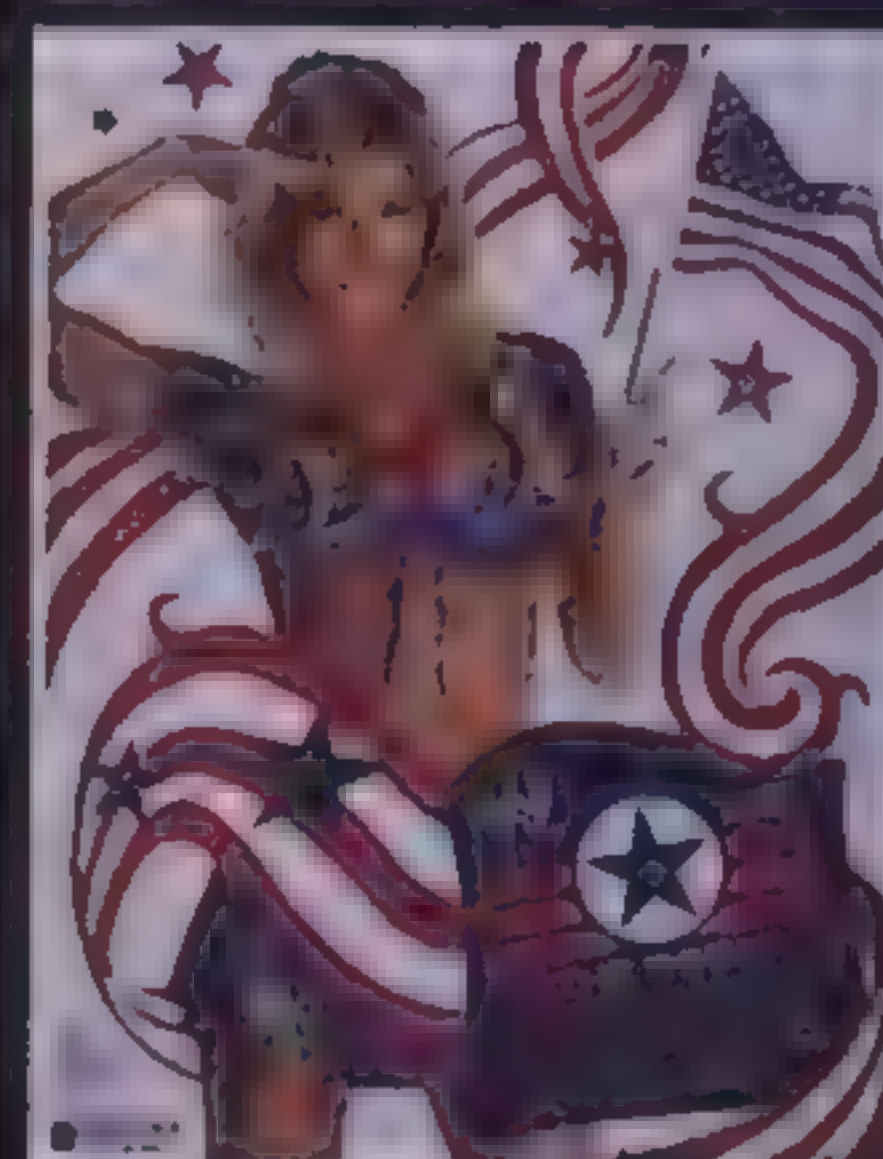
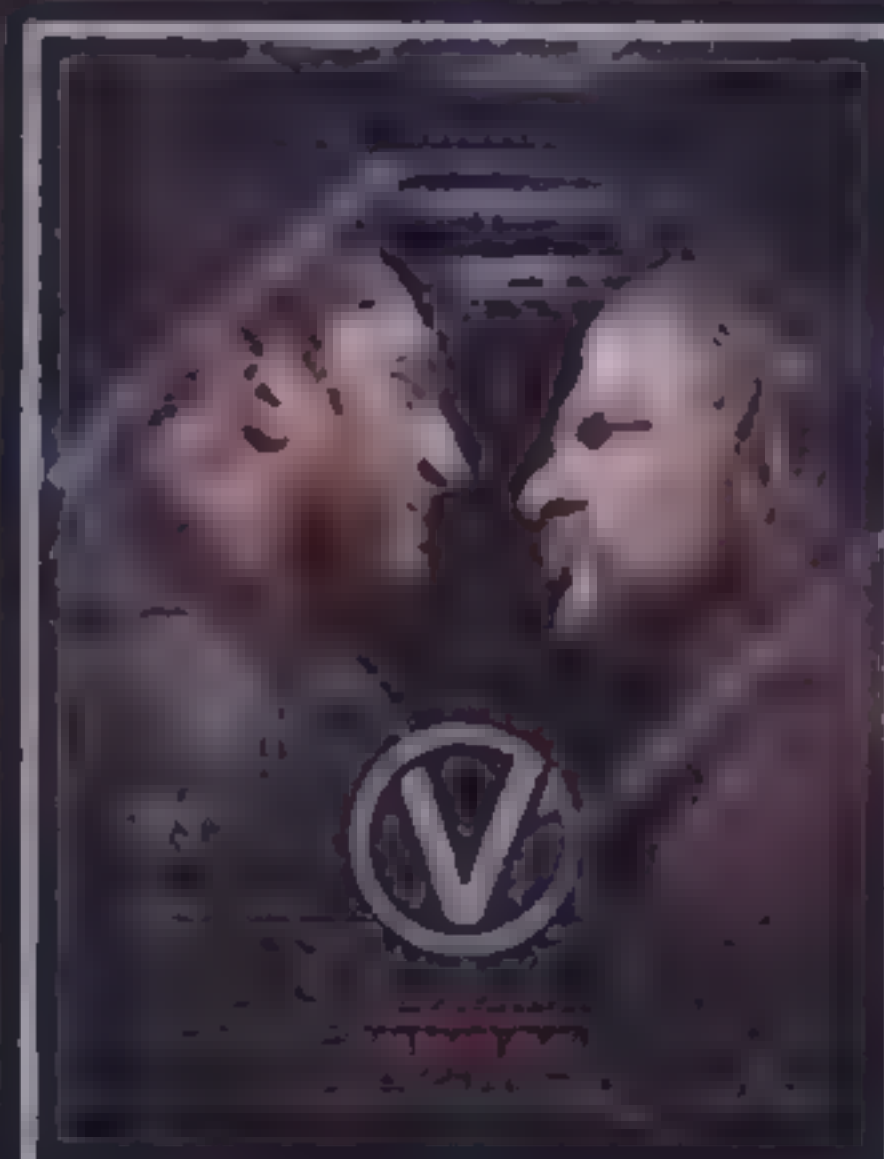
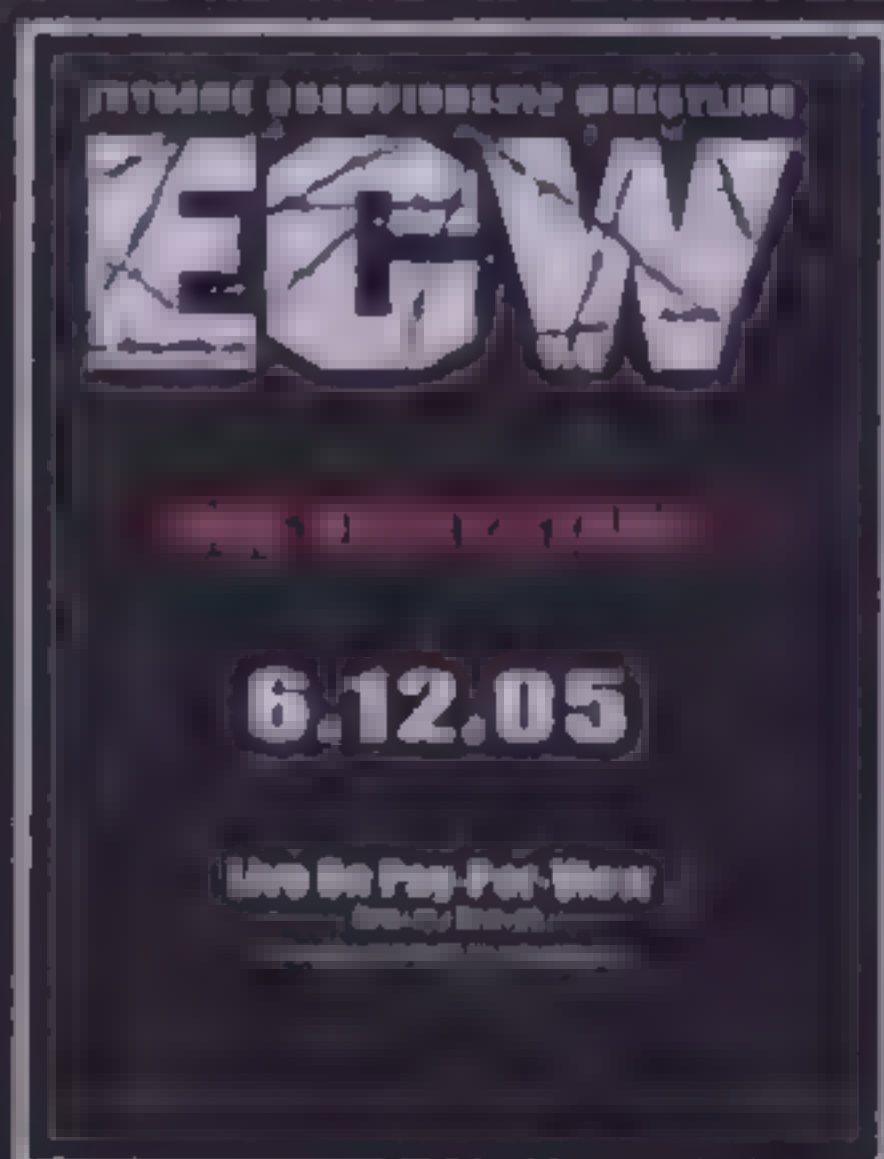
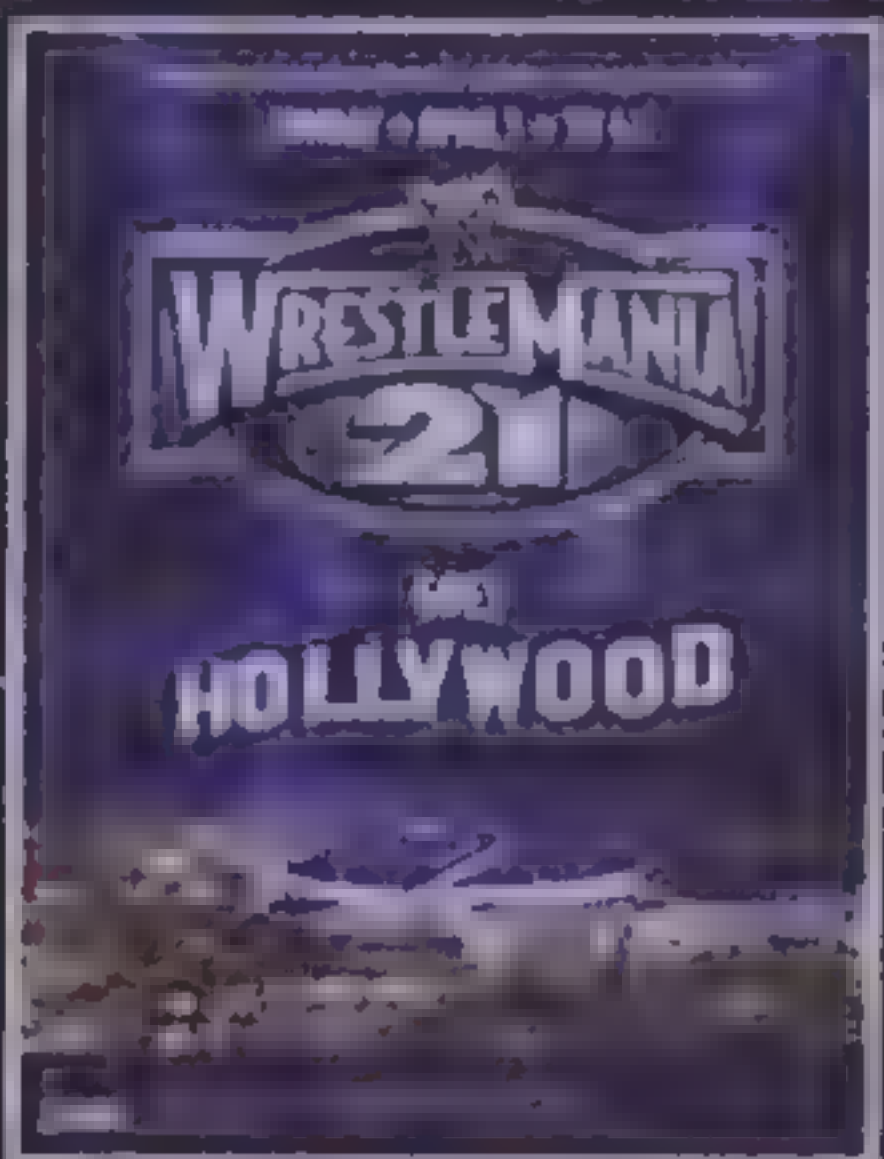
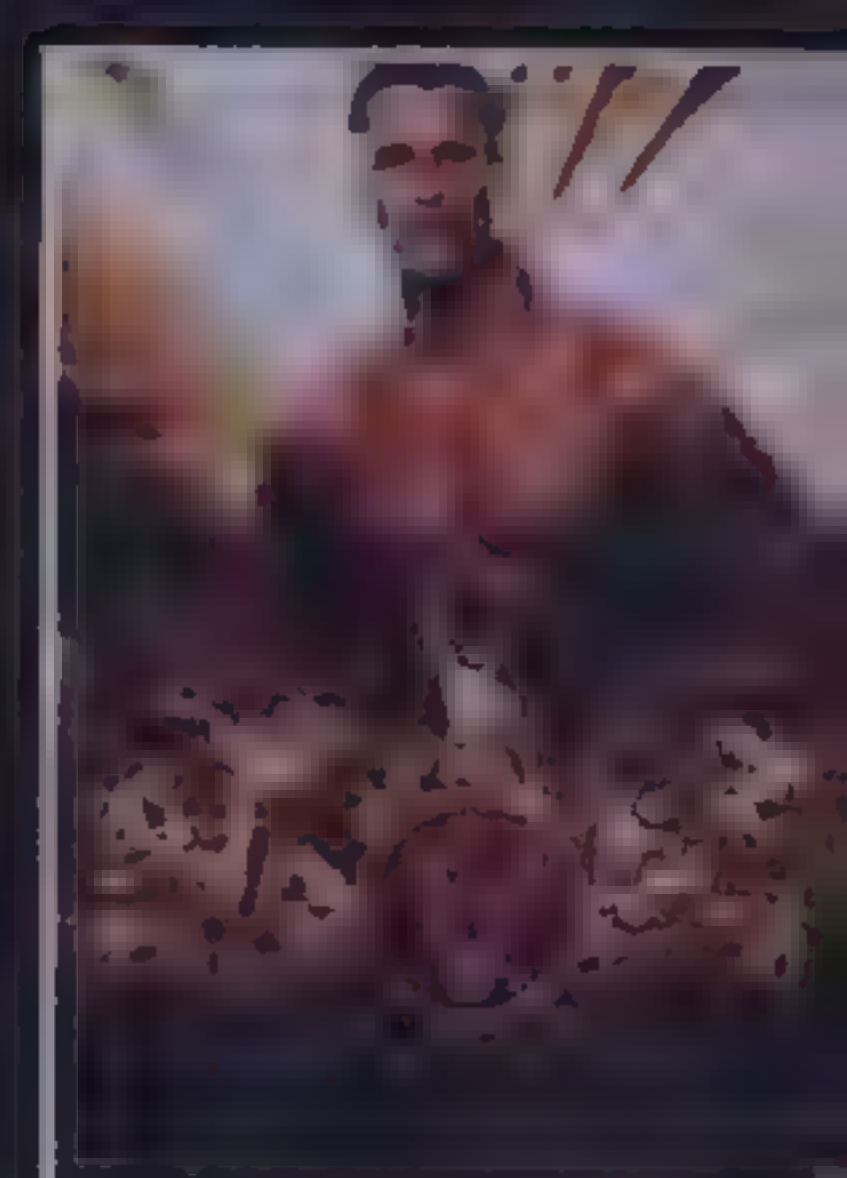
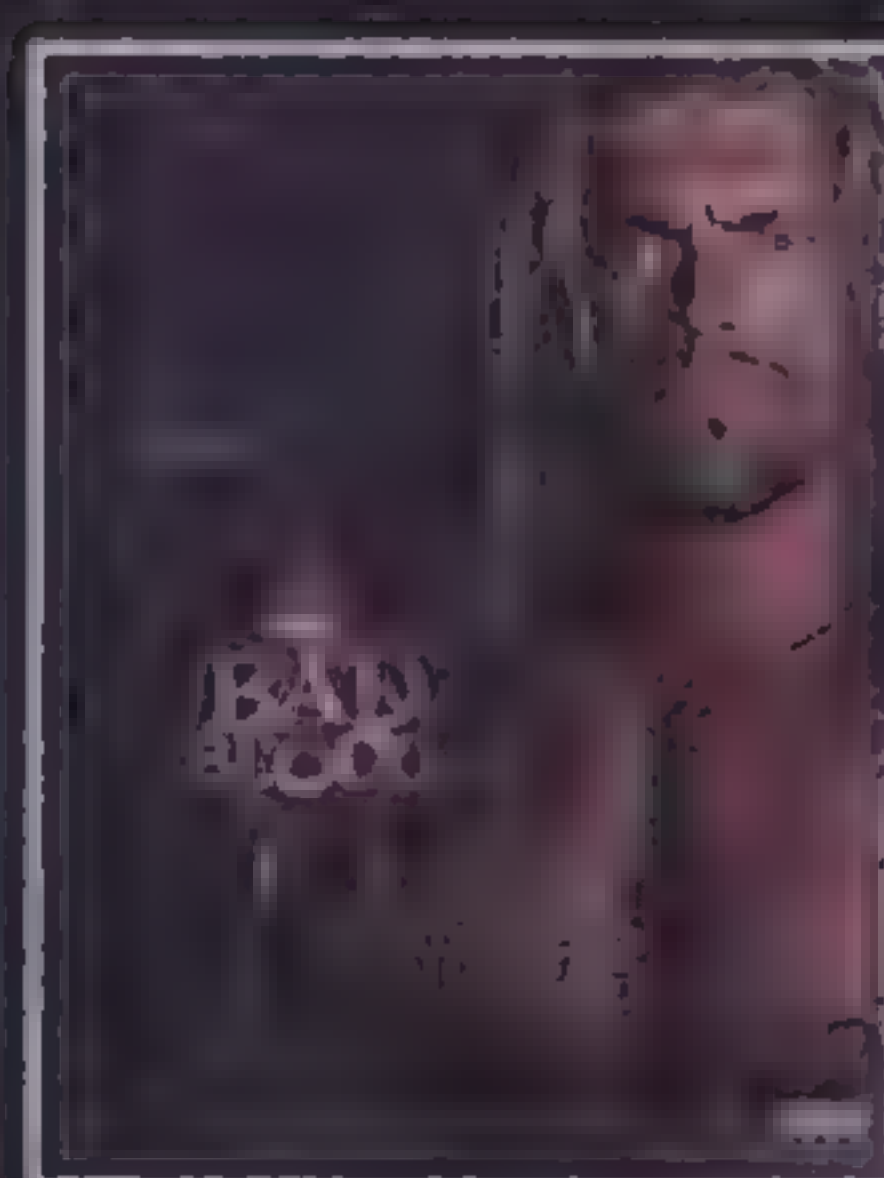
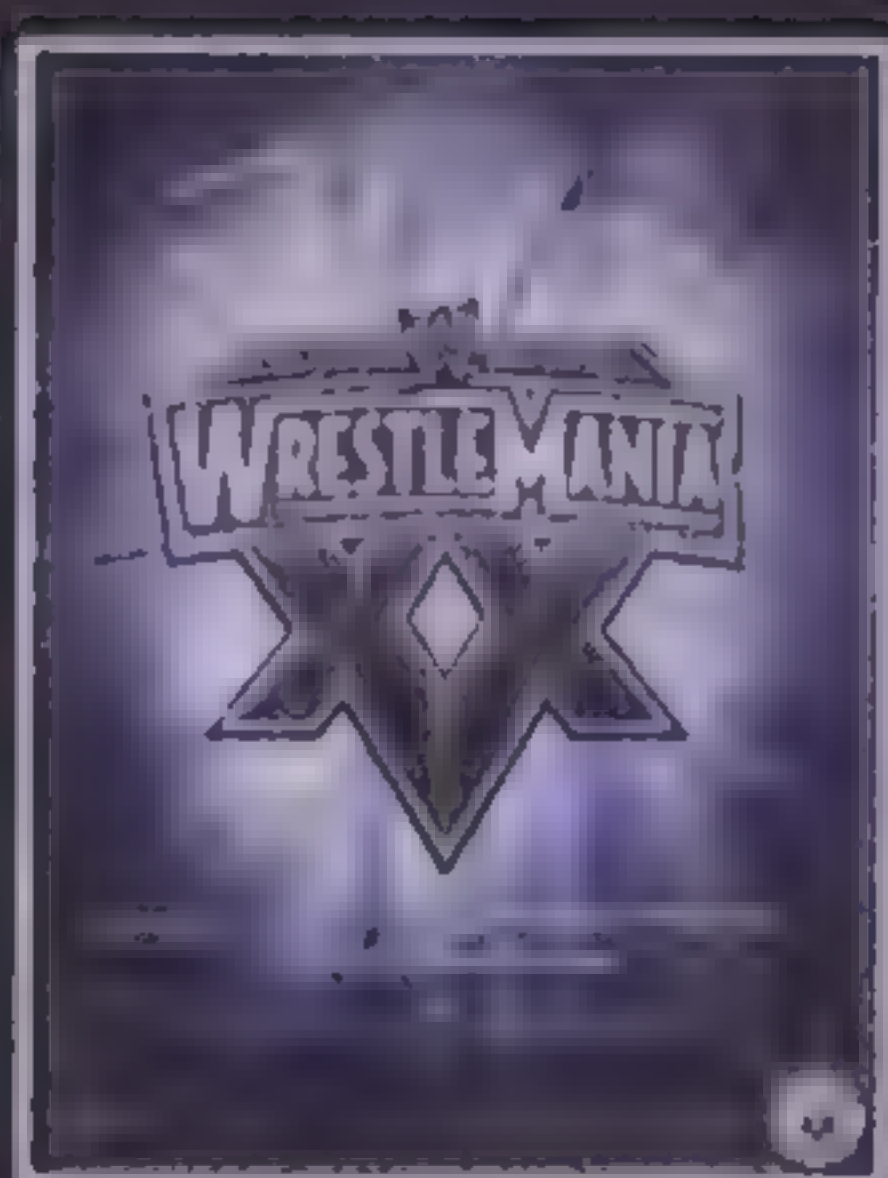
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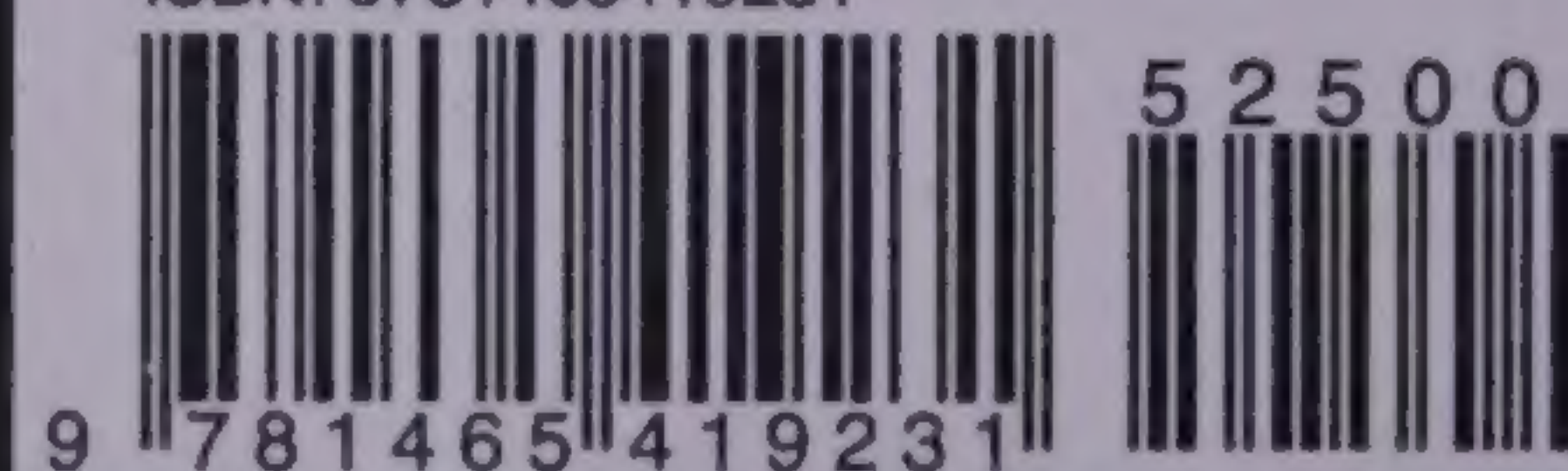
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